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The Magistrate

A. W. Pinero

P. O. angl.

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Pinero

BAYERISCHE
STAATS-
BIBLIOTHEK
MUENCHEN

Agnes

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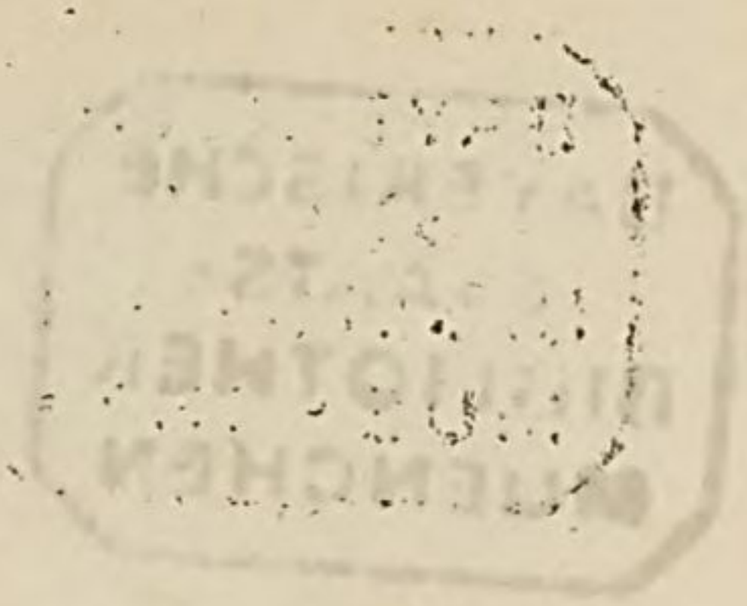
Christmas 1894



BAYERISCHE
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THE MAGISTRATE

NEW PLAYS. 5*s. each.*

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(6.)

THE MAGISTRATE

BAYERISCHE STAATS-BIBLIOTHEK MUENCHEN

A FARCE

In Three Acts

BY ARTHUR W. PINERO

LONDON: WILLIAM HEINEMANN

MDCCCXCII

6.

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

"THE MAGISTRATE" is, after "Sweet Lavender," perhaps the most popular of Mr. Pinero's plays, and it is particularly interesting as being the first of his works in which his own individuality found absolutely independent expression, and emphatically and triumphantly asserted itself. In fact, this farce marks an epoch in the dramatist's career, and shows him creating a really new and original order of English comic play, the further development of which may be traced in the successive plays which, together with "The Magistrate," formed the famous Court series of farces, namely, "The Schoolmistress," "Dandy Dick," and "The Cabinet Minister."

Because Mr. Pinero had previously written "The Rocket," and "In Chancery," for Mr. Edward Terry, who has performed them times out of number in London and the provinces with considerable success, it has been

assumed that "The Magistrate" was also written for Mr. Terry. But this was not the case. As a matter of fact Mr. Pinero wrote the play quite independently, and on its completion he was to have read it to Mr. Charles Wyndham, but the necessities of the Court Theatre intervened. The management of the late Mr. John Clayton and Arthur Cecil was decidedly in low water in 1884 and the earlier part of 1885; play after play had been produced without success, when at length application was made to Mr. Pinero for a new piece. They had been performing serious plays, and he read them "The Weaker Sex," which he had written some little time before; but Mr. Clayton felt uncertain about this play, which, by the way, Mr. and Mrs. Kendal have since produced, and then Mr. Pinero, mentioning the new comic play he had just finished, suggested that perhaps an entirely new order of entertainment might serve to change the fortunes of the house. "The Magistrate" was immediately accepted and produced, and his conjecture proved correct, for the luck of the theatre promptly turned.

"The Magistrate" was produced at the Court Theatre on Saturday, March 21, 1885, with a cast, particulars of which will be found in the following copy of the first night programme:—

ROYAL COURT THEATRE,

SLOANE SQUARE, S.W.

Lessees and Managers:

MR. JOHN CLAYTON and MR. ARTHUR CECIL.

THIS EVENING, SATURDAY, MARCH 21,

At a Quarter to Nine o'clock,

WILL BE PRODUCED FOR THE FIRST TIME,

THE MAGISTRATE,

AN ORIGINAL FARCE, IN THREE ACTS,

BY

A. W. PINERO.

MR. POSKET	Magistrates of the Mulberry Street Police Court	Mr. ARTHUR CECIL.
MR. BULLAMY		Mr. FRED CAPE.
COLONEL LUKYN (from Bengal—retired)		Mr. JOHN CLAYTON.
CAPTAIN HORACE VALE (Shropshire Fusiliers)		Mr. F. KERR.
CIS FARRINGDON (Mrs. Posket's son, by her first marriage)		Mr. H. EVERSFIELD.
ACHILLE BLOND (Proprietor of the Hôtel des Princes)		Mr. CHEVALIER.
ISIDORE (a Waiter)		Mr. DELANE.
MR. WORMINGTON (Chief Clerk at Mulberry Street)		Mr. GILBERT TRENT.
INSPECTOR MESSITER	Metropolitan Police	Mr. ALBERT SIMS.
SERJEANT LUGG		Mr. LUGG.
CONSTABLE HARRIS		Mr. BURNLEY.
WYKE (Servant at Mr. Posket's)		Mr. FAYRE.

AGATHA POSKET (late Farringdon, *née* Verrinder)	Mrs. JOHN WOOD.
CHARLOTTE (her Sister)	Miss MARION TERRY.
BEATIE TOMLINSON (a Young Lady reduced to teaching music)	Miss NORREYS.
POPHAM	Miss LA COSTE.

BAYERISCHE STAATS-BIBLIOTHEK MUENCHEN

ACT I.

THE FAMILY SKELETON.

At Mr. Posket's, Bloomsbury.

ACT II.

IT LEAVES ITS CUPBOARD.

Room in the Hôtel des Princes, Meek Street.

ACT III.

IT CRUMBLES.

SCENE 1.—*The Magistrate's Room, Mulberry Street.*
SCENE 2.—*At the Poskets' again.*

PRECEDED BY A COMEDIETTA BY

A. W. DUBOURG,

ENTITLED

TWENTY MINUTES UNDER AN UMBRELLA.

COUSIN KATE	Miss NORREYS.
COUSIN FRANK	Mr. H. REEVES SMITH.

Musical Director .	MR. CARL ARMBRUSTER.
Secretary .	MR. GEORGE COLEMAN.

The success of "The Magistrate" was immediate, and the Court Theatre was crowded night after night for more

than a year, the play being presented over 300 times. So prosperous was the run that there was no cessation during the Summer holiday season, and when Mr. Arthur Cecil went abroad for his vacation, his place as Posket was taken by Mr. Beerbohm Tree, while Miss Lottie Venne and Mrs. Tree in like manner relieved Mrs. John Wood and Miss Marion Terry.

This success, however, was not confined to London, for three companies were soon carrying the play triumphantly over the English provinces, while in September 1885 Mr. Pinero went to New York to produce his work at Daly's Theatre. Mr. Daly had suggested that Miss Ada Rehan should play the boy, Cis Farringdon, but to this the author objected, and Miss Rehan played Mrs. Posket, while Mr. Posket was represented by Mr. James Lewis, and Colonel Lukyn by Mr. John Drew. "The Magistrate" enjoyed an exceptionally long run in New York, as well as in Boston, and in the latter city it is now performed every year, being included in the regular season of classic English comedies at the Boston Museum. "The Magistrate" has also been played throughout the United States, the late John T. Raymond having been closely associated with the play for a considerable time.

"The Magistrate" has travelled more widely than most

modern English plays, and, besides being a stock piece in Australia, India, and South Africa, it has been translated into more than one foreign tongue. Under the title "Der Blaue Grotte" ("The Blue Grotto") it is constantly played all over Germany and Austria, while in the Slavonic language it is a favourite play at the National Theatre, Prague. At one time a proposal was made, through the late Mr. John Clayton, that "The Magistrate" should be adapted to the French stage, but the suggestions of the proposed Parisian adapter were, though eminently characteristic, of such a nature that Mr. Pinero did not feel justified in acceding to them.

While Mrs. John Wood and Mr. Arthur Chudleigh were still joint managers of the Court, there was some intention of reviving "The Magistrate" at that theatre, but as matters afterwards developed, Mr. Pinero arranged that the revival should take place under the auspices of Mr. Edward Terry, who accordingly appeared as Mr. Posket at his own theatre on Wednesday, April 13, 1892.

MALCOLM C. SALAMAN.

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

MR. POSKET (Magistrate of Mulberry Street Police Court)

AGATHA POSKET

CIS FARRINGDON (her Son)

CHARLOTTE VERRINDER (her Sister)

COLONEL LUKYN

CAPTAIN HORACE VALE

BEATIE TOMLINSON

MR. BULLAMY (Magistrate of Mulberry Street Police Court)

ACHILLE BLOND

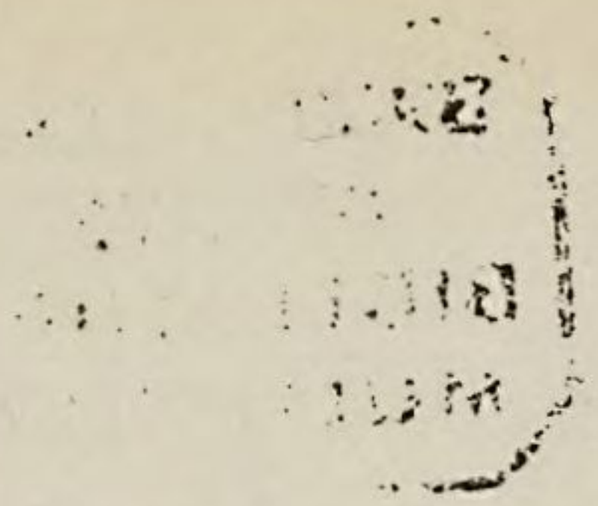
ISIDORE

MR. WORMINGTON

INSPECTOR MESSITER
SERGEANT LUGG
CONSTABLE HARRIS
} (Metropolitan Police)

WYKE

POPHAM



BAYERISCHE
STAATS-
BIBLIOTHEK
MUENCHEN

THE FIRST ACT

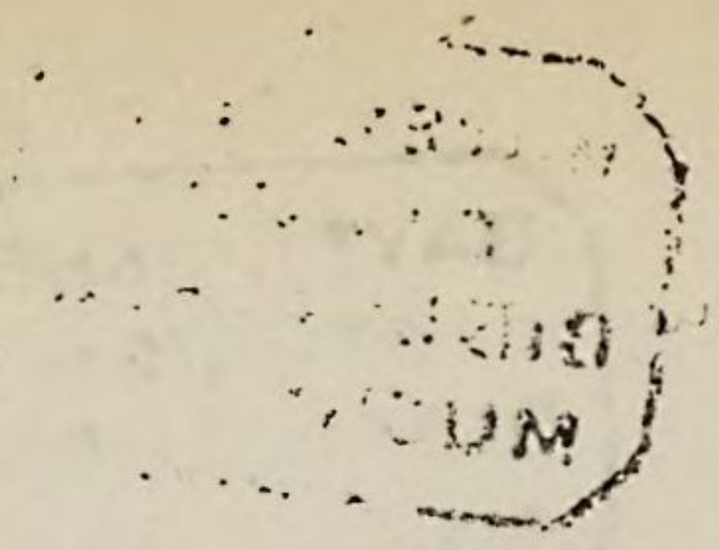
THE FAMILY SKELETON

THE SECOND ACT

IT LEAVES ITS CUPBOARD

THE THIRD ACT

IT CRUMBLES



BAYERISCHE
STAATS-
BIBLIOTHEK
MUENCHEN

THE MAGISTRATE

THE FIRST ACT

The scene represents a well-furnished drawing-room in the house of MR. POSKET *in Bloomsbury.*

BEATIE TOMLINSON, *a pretty, simply dressed little girl of about sixteen, is playing the piano, as* CIS FARRINGDON, *a manly youth wearing an Eton jacket, enters the room.*

CIS.

Beatie!

BEATIE.

Cis dear! Dinner isn't over, surely?

CIS.

Not quite. I had one of my convenient headaches and cleared out. [*Taking an apple and some cobnuts from his pocket and giving them to* BEATIE.] These are for you, dear, with my love. I sneaked 'em off the sideboard as I came out.

BEATIE.

Oh, I mustn't take them!

CIS.

Yes, you may—it's my share of dessert. Besides, it's a horrid shame you don't grub with us.

BEATIE.

What, a poor little music mistress!

CIS.

Yes, They're only going to give you four guineas a quarter. Fancy getting a girl like you for four guineas a quarter—why, an eighth of you is worth more than that! Now peg away at your apple.

[*Produces a cigarette.*

BEATIE.

There's company at dinner, isn't there?

[*Munching her apple.*

CIS.

Well, hardly. Aunt Charlotte hasn't arrived yet, so there's only old Bullamy.

BEATIE.

Isn't old Bullamy anybody?

CIS.

Old Bullamy—well, he's only like the guv'nor, a police magistrate at the Mulberry Street Police Court.

BEATIE.

Oh, does each police court have two magistrates?

CIS.

[*Proudly.*] All the best have two.

BEATIE.

Don't they quarrel over getting the interesting cases? I should.

CIS.

I don't know how they manage—perhaps they toss up who's to hear the big sensations. There's a Mrs. Beldam, who is rather a bore sometimes; I know the Guv always lets old Bullamy attend to her. But, as a rule, I fancy they go half and half, in a friendly way. [*Lighting cigarette.*] For instance, if the guv'nor wants to go to the Derby he lets old Bullamy have the Oaks—and so on, see?

[*He sits on the floor, comfortably reclining against* BEATIE, *and puffing his cigarette.*

BEATIE.

Oh, I say, Cis, won't your mamma be angry when she finds I haven't gone home?

CIS.

Oh, put it on to your pupil. Say I'm very backward.

BEATIE.

I think you are extremely forward—in some ways. [*Biting the apple and speaking with her mouth full.*] I do wish I could get you to concentrate your attention on your music lessons. But I wouldn't get you into a scrape!

CIS.

No fear of that. Ma is too proud of me.

BEATIE.

But there's your step-father.

CIS.

The dear old guv'nor! Why, he is too good-natured to say "Bo!" to a goose. You know, Beatie, I was at a school at Brighton when ma got married—when she got married the second time, I mean—and the guv'nor and I didn't make each other's acquaintance till after the honeymoon.

BEATIE.

Oh, fancy your step-father blindly accepting such a responsibility. [*Gives him a cobnut to crack for her.*

CIS.

Yes, wasn't the guv'nor soft! I might have been a very indifferent sort of young fellow for all he knew.

[*Having cracked the nut with his teeth, he returns it to her.*

BEATIE.

Thank you, dear.

CIS.

Well, when I heard the new dad was a police magistrate, I *was* scared. Said I to myself, "If I don't mind my P's and Q's, the guv'nor—from force of habit—will fine me all my pocket-money." But it's quite the reverse—he's the mildest, meekest——[*The door opens suddenly.*] Look out! Some one coming!

[*They both jump up,* BEATIE *scattering the nuts that are in her lap all over the floor.* CIS *throws his cigarette into the fireplace and sits at the piano, playing a simple exercise very badly.* BEATIE *stands behind him, counting.*

BEATIE.

One—and two—and one—and two.

WYKE, *the butler, appears at the door, and mysteriously closes it after him.*

WYKE.

Ssss! Master Cis! Master Cis!

CIS.

Hallo—what is it, Wyke?

WYKE.

[*Producing a decanter from under his coat.*] The port wine what you asked for, sir. I couldn't get it away before—the old gentlemen do hug port wine so.

CIS.

Got a glass?

WYKE.

Yes, sir. [*Producing wine-glass from his pocket, and pouring out wine.*] What ain't missed ain't mourned, eh, Master Cis?

CIS.

[*Offering wine.*] Here you are, Beatie dear.

BEATIE.

The idea of such a thing! I couldn't!

CIS.

Why not?

BEATIE.

If I merely sipped it I shouldn't be able to give you your music lesson properly. Drink it yourself, you dear, thoughtful boy.

CIS.

I shan't—it's for you.

BEATIE.

I can't drink it!

CIS.

You must.

BEATIE.

I won't!

CIS.

You're disagreeable!

BEATIE.

Not half so disagreeable as you are.

[*They wrangle.*

WYKE.

[*To himself, watching them.*] What a young gentleman it is! and only fourteen! Fourteen—he behaves like forty! [CIS *chokes as he is drinking the wine;* BEATIE *pats him on the back.*] Why, even Cook has made a 'ash of everything, since he's been in the house, and as for Popham——! [*Seeing some one approaching.*] Look out, Master Cis!

[CIS *returns to the piano,* BEATIE *counting as before.* WYKE *pretends to arrange the window curtains, concealing the decanter behind him.*

BEATIE.

One and two—and one and two—and one, &c.

Enter POPHAM, *a smart-looking maid-servant.*

POPHAM.

Wyke, where's the port?

WYKE.

[*Vacantly.*] Port?

POPHAM.

Port wine. Missus is furious.

WYKE.

Port?

POPHAM.

[*Pointing to the decanter.*] Why! There! You're carrying it about with you!

WYKE.

Why, so I am! Carrying it about with me! Shows what a sharp eye I keep on the guv'nor's wines. Carrying it about with me! Missus will be amused.

[*Goes out.*

POPHAM.

[*Eyeing* CIS *and* BEATIE.] There's that boy with *her* again! Minx! Her two hours was up long ago. Why doesn't she go home? Master Cis, I've got a message for you.

CIS.

[*Rising from the piano.*] For me, Popham?

POPHAM.

Yes, sir. [*Quietly to him.*] The message is from a young lady who up to last Wednesday was all in all to you. Her name is Emma Popham.

CIS.

[*Trying to get away.*] Oh, go along, Popham !

POPHAM.

[*Holding his sleeve.*] Ah, it wasn't "Go along, Popham" till that music girl came into the house. I will go along, but—cast your eye over this before you sleep to-night. [*She takes out of her pocket-handkerchief a piece of printed paper which she hands him between her finger and thumb.*] Part of a story in "Bow Bells," called "Jilted; or, Could Blood Atone?" Wrap it in your handkerchief—it came round the butter.

[*She goes out;* CIS *throws the paper into the grate.*

CIS.

Bother the girl ! Beatie, she's jealous of you !

BEATIE.

A parlour-maid jealous of *me*—and with a bit of a child of fourteen !

CIS.

I may be only fourteen, but I feel like a grown-up man ! You're only sixteen—there's not much difference—and if you will only wait for me, I'll soon catch you up and be as much a man as you are a woman. Will you wait for me, Beatie ?

BEATIE.

I can't—I'm getting older every minute !

CIS.

Oh, I wish I could borrow five or six years from somebody !

BEATIE.

Many a person would be glad to lend them. [*Lovingly.*] And oh, I wish you could!

CIS.

[*Putting his arm round her.*] You do! Why?

BEATIE.

Because I—because——

CIS.

[*Listening.*] Look out! Here's the mater!

[*They run to the piano, he resumes playing, and she counting as before.*

BEATIE.

One and two—and one—and two, &c.

Enter AGATHA POSKET, *a handsome, showy woman, of about thirty-six, looking perhaps younger.*

AGATHA POSKET.

Why, Cis child, at your music again?

CIS.

Yes, ma, always at it. You'll spoil my taste by forcing it if you're not careful.

AGATHA POSKET.

We have no right to keep Miss Tomlinson so late.

BEATIE.

Oh, thank you, it doesn't matter. I—I—am afraid we're not making—very—great—progress.

CIS.

[*Winking at* BEATIE.] Well, if I play that again, will you kiss me?

BEATIE.

[*Demurely.*] I don't know, I'm sure. [*To* AGATHA POSKET.] May I promise that, m'am?

[*Sits in the window recess.* CIS, *joining her, puts his arm round her waist.*

AGATHA POSKET.

No, certainly not. [*To herself, watching them.*] If I could only persuade Æneas to dismiss this *protégée* of his, and to engage a music-master, it would ease my conscience a little. If this girl knew the truth, how indignant she would be! And then there is the injustice to the boy himself, and to my husband's friends who are always petting and fondling and caressing what they call "a fine little man of fourteen!" Fourteen! Oh, what an idiot I have been to conceal my child's real age! [*Looking at the clock.*] Charlotte is late; I wish she would come. It will be a relief to worry her with my troubles.

MR. POSKET.

[*Talking outside.*] We smoke all over the house, Bullamy, all over the house.

AGATHA POSKET.

I will speak to Æneas about this little girl, at any rate.

Enter MR. POSKET, *a mild gentleman of about fifty, smoking a cigarette, followed by* MR. BULLAMY, *a fat, red-faced man with a bronchial cough and general huskiness.*

MR. POSKET.

Smoke anywhere, Bullamy—smoke anywhere.

MR. BULLAMY.

Not with my bronchitis, thank ye.

MR. POSKET.

[*Beaming at* AGATHA POSKET.] Ah, my darling!

MR. BULLAMY.

[*Producing a small box from his waistcoat pocket.*] All I take after dinner is a jujube—sometimes two. [*Offering the box.*] May I tempt Mrs. Posket?

AGATHA POSKET.

No, thank you. [*Treading on one of the nuts which have been scattered over the room.*] How provoking—who brings nuts into the drawing-room?

MR. POSKET.

Miss Tomlinson still here? [*To* BEATIE.] Don't go, don't go. Glad to see Cis so fond of his music. Your sister Charlotte is behind her time, my darling.

AGATHA POSKET.

Her train is delayed, I suppose.

MR. POSKET.

You must stay and see my sister-in-law, Bullamy.

MR. BULLAMY.

Pleasure—pleasure!

MR. POSKET.

I have never met her yet, we will share first impressions. In the interim, will Miss Tomlinson delight us with a little music?

MR. BULLAMY.

[*Bustling up to the piano.*] If this young lady is going to sing she might like one of my jujubes.

[BEATIE *sits at the piano with* CIS *and* MR. BULLAMY *on each side of her.* MR. POSKET *treads on a nut as he walks over to his wife.*

MR. POSKET.

Dear me—how come nuts into the drawing-room? [*To* AGATHA.] Of what is my darling thinking so deeply? [*Treads on another nut.*] Another! My pet, there are nuts on the drawing-room carpet!

AGATHA POSKET.

Yes, I want to speak to you, Æneas.

MR. POSKET.

About the nuts?

AGATHA POSKET.

No—about Miss Tomlinson—your little *protégée*.

MR. POSKET.

Ah, nice little thing.

AGATHA POSKET.

Very. But not old enough to exert any decided influence over the boy's musical future. Why not engage a master ?

MR. POSKET.

What, for a mere child ?

AGATHA POSKET.

A mere child—oh !

MR. POSKET.

A boy of fourteen !

AGATHA POSKET.

[*To herself.*] Fourteen !

MR. POSKET.

A boy of fourteen, not yet out of Czerny's exercises.

AGATHA POSKET.

[*To herself.*] If we were alone now, I might have the desperation to tell him all !

MR. POSKET.

Besides, my darling, you know the interest I take in Miss Tomlinson ; she is one of the brightest little spots on my hobby-horse. Like all our servants, like everybody in my employ, she has been brought to my notice through the unhappy medium of the Police Court over which it is my destiny to preside. Our servant, Wyke, a man with a beautiful nature, is the son of a person I committed for trial for marrying

three wives. To this day, Wyke is ignorant as to which of those three wives he is the son of! Cook was once a notorious dipsomaniac, and has even now not entirely freed herself from early influences. Popham is the unclaimed charge of a convicted baby-farmer. Even our milkman came before me as a man who had refused to submit specimens to the analytic inspector. And this poor child, what is she?

AGATHA POSKET.

Yes, I know.

MR. POSKET.

The daughter of a superannuated General, who abstracted four silk umbrellas from the Army and Navy Stores—and on a fine day too!

[BEATIE *ceases playing.*

MR. BULLAMY.

Very good—very good!

MR. POSKET.

Thank you—thank you!

MR. BULLAMY.

[*To* MR. POSKET, *coughing and laughing and popping a jujube into his mouth.*] My dear Posket, I really must congratulate you on that boy of yours—your step-son. A most wonderful lad. So confoundedly advanced too.

MR. POSKET.

Yes, isn't he? Eh!

MR. BULLAMY.

[*Confidentially.*] While the piano was going on just now, he told me one of the most humorous stories I've ever heard. [*Laughing heartily and panting, then taking another jujube.*] Ha, ha, bless me, I don't know when I have taken so many jujubes!

MR. POSKET.

My dear Bullamy, my entire marriage is the greatest possible success. A little romantic, too. [*Pointing to* AGATHA POSKET.] Beautiful woman!

MR. BULLAMY.

Very, very. I never committed a more stylish, elegant creature.

MR. POSKET.

Thank you, Bullamy—we met abroad, at Spa, when I was on my holiday.

WYKE *enters with tea-tray, which he hands round.*

MR. BULLAMY.

I shall go there next year.

MR. POSKET.

She lost her first husband about twelve months ago in India. He was an army contractor.

BEATIE.

[*To* CIS *at the piano.*] I must go now—there's no excuse for staying any longer.

CIS.

[*To her disconsolately.*] What the deuce shall *I* do?

MR. POSKET.

[*Pouring out milk.*] Dear me, this milk seems very poor. When he died, she came to England, placed her boy at a school in Brighton, and then moved about quietly from place to place, drinking——

[*Sips tea.*

MR. BULLAMY.

Drinking?

MR. POSKET.

The waters—she's a little dyspeptic. [WYKE *goes out.*] We encountered each other at the *Tours des Fontaines*—by accident I trod upon her dress——

BEATIE.

Good-night, Cis dear.

CIS.

Oh!

MR. POSKET.

[*Continuing to* MR. BULLAMY.] I apologised. We talked about the weather, we drank out of the same glass, discovered that we both suffered from the same ailment, and the result is complete happiness.

[*He bends over* AGATHA POSKET *gallantly.*

AGATHA POSKET.

Æneas!

[*He kisses her, then* CIS *kisses* BEATIE, *loudly;* MR. POSKET *and* MR. BULLAMY *both listen puzzled.*

MR. POSKET.

Echo?

MR. BULLAMY.

Suppose so!

[*He kisses the back of his hand experimentally;* BEATIE *kisses* CIS.

MR. BULLAMY.

Yes.

MR. POSKET.

Curious. [*To* MR. BULLAMY.] Romantic story, isn't it?

BEATIE.

Good-night, Mrs. Posket! I shall be here early to-morrow morning.

AGATHA POSKET.

I am afraid you are neglecting your other pupils.

BEATIE.

Oh, they're not so interesting as Cis—[*correcting herself*] Master Farringdon. Good-night.

AGATHA POSKET.

Good-night, dear.

[BEATIE *goes out quietly;* AGATHA POSKET *joins* CIS.

MR. POSKET.

[*To* MR. BULLAMY.] We were married abroad without consulting friends or relations on either side. That's how it is I have never seen my sister-in-law, Miss Verrinder, who is coming from Shropshire to stay with us—she ought to——

WYKE *enters.*

WYKE.

Miss Verrinder has come, ma'am.

MR. POSKET.

Here she is.

AGATHA POSKET.

Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE, *a fine handsome girl, enters, followed by* POPHAM *with hand luggage.*

AGATHA POSKET.

[*Kissing her.*] My dear Charley.

[WYKE *goes out.*

CHARLOTTE.

Aggy darling, aren't I late! There's a fog on the line—you could cut it with a knife. [*Seeing* CIS.] Is that your boy?

AGATHA POSKET.

Yes.

CHARLOTTE.

Good gracious! What is he doing in an Eton jacket at his age?

AGATHA POSKET.

[*Softly to* CHARLOTTE.] Hush! don't say a word about my boy's age yet awhile.

CHARLOTTE.

Oh!

AGATHA POSKET.

[*About to introduce* MR. POSKET.] There is my husband.

CHARLOTTE.

[*Mistaking* MR. BULLAMY *for him.*] Oh! how could she! [*To* MR. BULLAMY, *turning her cheek to him.*] I congratulate you—I suppose you ought to kiss me.

AGATHA POSKET.

No, no!

MR. POSKET.

Welcome to my house, Miss Verrinder.

CHARLOTTE.

Oh, I beg your pardon. How do you do?

MR. BULLAMY.

[*To himself.*] Mrs. Posket's an interfering woman.

MR. POSKET.

[*Pointing to* MR. BULLAMY.] Mr. Bullamy.

[MR. BULLAMY, *aggrieved, bows stiffly.*

AGATHA POSKET.

[*To* CHARLOTTE.] Come upstairs, dear; will you have some tea?

CHARLOTTE.

No thank you, pet, but I should like a glass of soda water.

AGATHA POSKET.

Soda water!

CHARLOTTE.

Well dear, you can put what you like at the bottom of it.

[AGATHA POSKET *and* CHARLOTTE *go out*, POPHAM *following*.

POPHAM.

[*To* CIS.] Give me back my "Bow Bells," when you have read it, you imp. [*Goes out.*

CIS.

By Jove, Guv, isn't Aunt Charlotte a stunner?

MR. POSKET.

Seems a charming woman.

MR. BULLAMY.

Posket's got the wrong one! That comes of marrying without first seeing the lady's relations.

CIS.

Come along, Guv—let's have a gamble—Mr. Bullamy will join us.

[*Opens the card-table, arranges chairs and candles.*

MR. BULLAMY.

A gamble?

MR. POSKET.

Yes—the boy has taught me a new game called "Fireworks;" his mother isn't aware that we play for money, of course, but we do.

MR. BULLAMY.

Ha, ha, ha! Who wins?

MR. POSKET.

He does now—but he says I shall win when I know the game better.

MR. BULLAMY.

What a boy he is!

MR. POSKET.

Isn't he a wonderful lad? And only fourteen, too. I'll tell you something else—perhaps you had better not mention it to his mother.

MR. BULLAMY.

No, no, certainly not.

MR. POSKET.

He's invested a little money for me.

MR. BULLAMY.

What in?

MR. POSKET.

Not *in—on*—on Sillikin for the Lincolnshire Handicap. Sillikin to win and Butterscotch one, two, three.

MR. BULLAMY.

Good Lord!

MR. POSKET.

Yes, the dear boy said, "Guv, it isn't fair you should give me all the tips, I'll give you some,"—and

he did—he gave me Sillikin and Butterscotch. He'll manage it for you, if you like. "Plank it down," he calls it.

MR. BULLAMY.

[*Chuckling and choking.*] Ha! ha! Ho! ho! [*Taking a jujube.*] This boy will ruin me in jujubes.

CIS.

All ready! Look sharp! Guv, lend me a sov to start with?

MR. POSKET.

A sov to start with? [*They sit at the table.* AGATHA POSKET *and* CHARLOTTE *come into the room.*] We didn't think you would return so soon, my darling.

AGATHA POSKET.

Go on amusing yourselves, I insist, only don't teach my Cis to play cards.

MR. BULLAMY.

Ho! ho!

MR. POSKET.

[*To* MR. BULLAMY.] Hush! Hush!

AGATHA POSKET.

[*To* CHARLOTTE.] I'm glad of this—we can tell each other our miseries undisturbed. Will you begin?

CHARLOTTE.

Well, at last I am engaged to Captain Horace Vale.

AGATHA POSKET.

Oh! Charley, I'm so glad!

CHARLOTTE.

Yes—so is he—he says. He proposed to me at the Hunt Ball—in the passage—Tuesday week.

AGATHA POSKET.

What did he say?

CHARLOTTE.

He said, "By Jove, I love you awfully."

AGATHA POSKET.

Well—and what did you say?

CHARLOTTE.

Oh, I said, "Well, if you're going to be as eloquent as all that, by Jove, I can't stand out." So we settled it, in the passage. He bars flirting till after we're married. That's my misery. What's yours, Aggy?

AGATHA POSKET.

Something awful!

CHARLOTTE.

Cheer up, Aggy! What is it?

AGATHA POSKET.

Well, Charley, you know I lost my poor dear first husband at a very delicate age.

CHARLOTTE.

Well, you were five-and-thirty, dear.

AGATHA POSKET.

Yes, that's what I mean. Five-and-thirty is a very delicate age to find yourself single. You're neither one thing nor the other. You're not exactly a two-year-old, and you don't care to pull a hansom. However, I soon met Mr. Posket at Spa—bless him!

CHARLOTTE.

And you nominated yourself for the Matrimonial Stakes. Mr. Farringdon's The Widow, by Bereavement, out of Mourning, ten pounds extra.

AGATHA POSKET.

Yes, Charley, and in less than a month I went triumphantly over the course. But, Charley dear, I didn't carry the fair weight for age—and that's my trouble.

CHARLOTTE.

Oh, dear!

AGATHA POSKET.

Undervaluing Æneas' love, in a moment of, I hope, not unjustifiable vanity, I took five years from my total, which made me thirty-one on my wedding morning.

CHARLOTTE.

Well, dear, many a misguided woman has done that before you.

AGATHA POSKET.

Yes, Charley, but don't you see the consequences? It has thrown everything out. As I am now thirty-one, instead of thirty-six as I ought to be, it stands to

reason that I couldn't have been married twenty years ago, which I was. So I have had to fib in proportion.

CHARLOTTE.

I see—making your first marriage occur only fifteen years ago.

AGATHA POSKET.

Exactly.

CHARLOTTE.

Well then, dear, why worry yourself further?

AGATHA POSKET.

Why, dear, don't you see? If I am only thirty-one now, my boy couldn't have been born nineteen years ago, and if he could, he oughtn't to have been, because, on my own showing, I wasn't married till four years later. Now you see the result!

CHARLOTTE.

Which is, that that fine strapping young gentleman over there is only fourteen.

AGATHA POSKET.

Precisely. Isn't it awkward! and his moustache is becoming more and more obvious every day.

CHARLOTTE.

What does the boy himself believe?

AGATHA POSKET.

He believes his mother, of course, as a boy should. As a prudent woman, I always kept him in ignorance of his age—in case of necessity. But it is terribly hard

on the poor child, because his aims, instincts, and ambitions are all so horribly in advance of his condition. His food, his books, his amusements are out of keeping with his palate, his brain, and his disposition; and with all this suffering—his wretched mother has the remorseful consciousness of having shortened her offspring's life.

CHARLOTTE.

Oh, come, you haven't quite done that.

AGATHA POSKET.

Yes, I have—because, if he lives to be a hundred, he must be buried at ninety-five.

CHARLOTTE.

That's true.

AGATHA POSKET.

Then, there's another aspect. He's a great favourite with all our friends—women friends especially. Even his little music mistress and the girl-servants hug and kiss him because he's such an engaging boy, and I can't stop it. But it's very awful to see these innocent women fondling a young man of nineteen.

CHARLOTTE.

The women don't know it.

AGATHA POSKET.

But they'd like to know it. I mean they ought to know it! The other day I found my poor boy sitting on Lady Jenkins's lap, and in the presence of Sir George. I have no right to compromise Lady Jenkins

in that way. And now, Charley, you see the whirlpool in which I am struggling—if you can throw me a rope, pray do.

CHARLOTTE.

What sort of a man is Mr. Posket, Aggy?

AGATHA POSKET.

The best creature in the world. He's a practical philanthropist.

CHARLOTTE.

Um—he's a Police Magistrate, too, isn't he?

AGATHA POSKET.

Yes, but he pays out of his own pocket half the fines he inflicts. That's why he has had a reprimand from the Home Office for inflicting such light penalties. All our servants have graduated at Mulberry Street. Most of the pictures in the dining-room are genuine Constables.

CHARLOTTE.

Take my advice—tell him the whole story.

AGATHA POSKET.

I dare not!

CHARLOTTE.

Why?

AGATHA POSKET.

I should have to take such a back seat for the rest of my married life.

[*The party at the card-table breaks up.*

MR. BULLAMY.

[*Grumpily.*] No, thank you, not another minute. [*To* MR. POSKET.] What is the use of talking about revenge, my dear Posket, when I haven't a penny piece left to play with?

MR. POSKET.

I'm in the same predicament! Cis will lend us some money, won't you, Cis?

CIS.

Rather!

MR. BULLAMY.

No, thank ye, that boy is one too many for me. I've never met such a child. Good-night, Mrs. Posket. [*Treads on a nut.*] Confound the nuts!

AGATHA POSKET.

Going so early?

CIS.

[*To* MR. POSKET.] I hate a bad loser, don't you, Guv?

AGATHA POSKET.

Show Mr. Bullamy down stairs, Cis.

MR. BULLAMY.

Good-night, Posket. Oh! I haven't a shilling left for my cabman.

CIS.

I'll pay the cab.

MR. BULLAMY.

No, thank you! I'll walk. [*Opening jujube box.*] Bah! Not even a jujube left and on a foggy night, too! Ugh! [*Goes out.*

Enter WYKE *with four letters on salver.*

CIS.

[*To* WYKE.] Any for me?

WYKE.

One, sir.

CIS.

[*To himself.*] From Achille Blond; lucky the mater didn't see it. [*Goes out.*

[WYKE *hands letters to* AGATHA POSKET, *who takes two, then to* MR. POSKET, *who takes one.*

AGATHA POSKET.

This is for you, Charley—already.

[WYKE *goes out.*

CHARLOTTE.

Spare my blushes, dear—it's from Horace, Captain Vale. The dear wretch knew I was coming to you. Heigho! Will you excuse me?

MR. POSKET.

Certainly.

AGATHA POSKET.

Excuse me, please?

CHARLOTTE.

Certainly, my dear.

MR. POSKET.

Certainly, my darling. Excuse me, won't you?

CHARLOTTE.

Oh, certainly.

AGATHA POSKET.

Certainly, Æneas.

[*Simultaneously they all open their letters, and lean back and read.*

AGATHA POSKET.

[*Reading.*] Lady Jenkins is not feeling very well.

CHARLOTTE.

If Captain Horace Vale stood before me at this moment, I'd slap his face!

AGATHA POSKET.

Charlotte!

CHARLOTTE.

[*Reading.*] "Dear Miss Verrinder,—Your desperate flirtation with Major Bristow at the Meet on Tuesday last, three days after our engagement, has just come to my knowledge. Your letters and gifts, including the gold-headed hair-pin given me at the Hunt Ball, shall be returned to-morrow. By Jove, all is over! Horace Vale." Oh, dear!

AGATHA POSKET.

Oh, Charley, I'm so sorry! However, you can deny it.

CHARLOTTE.

[*Weeping.*] That's the worst of it, I can't.

MR. POSKET.

[*To* AGATHA POSKET.] My darling, you will be delighted. A note from Colonel Lukyn.

AGATHA POSKET.

Lukyn—Lukyn? I seem to know the name.

MR. POSKET.

An old schoolfellow of mine who went to India many years ago. He has just come home. I met him at the club last night and asked him to name an evening to dine with us. He accepts for to-morrow.

AGATHA POSKET.

Lukyn, Lukyn?

MR. POSKET.

Listen. [*Reading.*] "It will be especially delightful to me, as I believe I am an old friend of your wife and of her first husband. You may recall me to her recollection by reminding her that I am the Captain Lukyn who stood sponsor to her boy when he was christened at Baroda."

AGATHA POSKET.

[*Giving a loud scream.*] Oh!

MR. POSKET.

My dear!

AGATHA POSKET.

I've twisted my foot.

MR. POSKET.

How *do* nuts come into the drawing-room?

CHARLOTTE.

[*Quietly to* AGATHA POSKET.] Aggy?

AGATHA POSKET.

[*To* CHARLOTTE.] The boy's god-father.

CHARLOTTE.

When was the child christened?

AGATHA POSKET.

A month after he was born. They always are.

MR. POSKET.

[*Reading the letter again.*] This is *very* pleasant.

AGATHA POSKET.

[*To* MR. POSKET.] Let—let me see the letter, I—I may recognise the handwriting.

MR. POSKET.

[*Handing her the letter.*] Certainly, my pet. [*To himself.*] Awakened memories of Number One. That's the worst of marrying a widow; somebody is always proving her previous convictions.

AGATHA POSKET.

[*To* CHARLOTTE.] "No. 19a, Cork Street!" Charley, put on your things and come with me.

CHARLOTTE.

Agatha, you're mad!

AGATHA POSKET.

I'm going to shut this man's mouth before he comes into this house to-morrow.

CHARLOTTE.

Wait *till* he comes.

AGATHA POSKET.

Yes, till he stalks in here with his "How d'ye do, Posket? Haven't seen your wife since the year '66, by Gad, sir!" Not I! Æneas!

MR. POSKET.

My dear.

AGATHA POSKET.

Lady Jenkins—Adelaide—is very ill; she can't put her foot to the ground with neuralgia.

[*Taking the letter from her pocket, and giving it to him.*

MR. POSKET.

Bless me!

AGATHA POSKET.

We have known each other for six long years.

MR. POSKET.

Only six weeks, my love.

AGATHA POSKET.

Weeks *are* years in close friendship. My place is by her side.

MR. POSKET.

[*Reading the letter.*] "Slightly indisposed, caught trifling cold at the Dog Show. Where do you buy your handkerchiefs?" There's nothing about neuralgia or putting her foot to the ground here, my darling.

AGATHA POSKET.

No, but can't you read between the lines, Æneas? That is the letter of a woman who is not at all well.

MR. POSKET.

All right, my darling, if you are bent upon going I will accompany you.

AGATHA POSKET.

Certainly not, Æneas—Charlotte insists on being my companion; we can keep each other warm in a closed cab.

MR. POSKET.

But can't I make a third?

AGATHA POSKET.

Don't be so forgetful, Æneas—don't you know that in a four-wheeled cab, the fewer knees there are the better. [AGATHA POSKET *and* CHARLOTTE *go out.*

CIS *comes in hurriedly.*

CIS.

What's the matter, Guv?

MR. POSKET.

Your mother and Miss Verrinder are going out.

CIS.

Out of their minds? It's a horrid night.

MR. POSKET.

Yes, but Lady Jenkins is ill.

CIS.

Oh! Is ma mentioned in the will?

MR. POSKET.

Good gracious, what a boy! No, Cis, your mother is merely going to sit by Lady Jenkins' bedside, to hold her hand, and to tell her where one goes to—to buy pocket-handkerchiefs.

CIS.

By Jove! The mater can't be home again till half-past twelve or one o'clock.

MR. POSKET.

Much later if Lady Jenkins' condition is alarming.

CIS.

Hurray! [*He takes the watch out of* MR. POSKET'S *pocket.*] Just half-past ten. Greenwich mean, eh, Guv?

[*He puts the watch to his ear, pulling* MR. POSKET *towards him by the chain.*

MR. POSKET.

What an extraordinary lad!

CIS.

[*Returning watch.*] Thanks. They have to get from here to Campden Hill and back again. I'll tell Wyke to get them the worst horse on the rank.

MR. POSKET.

My dear child!

CIS.

Three-quarters of an hour's journey from here at least. Twice three-quarters, one hour and a half. An hour with Lady Jenkins—when women get together, you know, Guv, they do talk—that's two hours and a half. Good. Guv, will you come with me?

MR. POSKET.

Go with you! Where?

CIS.

Hotel des Princes, Meek Street. A sharp hansom does it in ten minutes.

MR. POSKET.

Meek Street, Hotel des Princes! Child, do you know what you're talking about?

CIS.

Rather. Look here, Guv, honour bright—no blab if I show you a letter.

MR. POSKET.

I won't promise anything.

CIS.

You won't! Do you know, Guv, you are doing a very unwise thing to check the confidence of a lad like me?

MR. POSKET.

Cis, my boy!

CIS.

Can you calculate the inestimable benefit it is to a youngster to have some one always at his elbow, some one older, wiser, and better off than himself?

MR. POSKET.

Of course, Cis, of course, I *want* you to make a companion of me.

CIS.

Then how the deuce can I do that if you won't come with me to Meek Street?

MR. POSKET.

Yes, but deceiving your mother!

CIS.

Deceiving the mater would be to tell her a crammer—a thing, I hope, we're both of us much above.

MR. POSKET.

Good boy, good boy.

CIS.

Concealing the fact that we're going to have a bit of supper at the Hotel des Princes, is doing my mother a great kindness, because it would upset her considerably to know of the circumstances. You've been wrong, Guv, but we won't say anything more about that. Read the letter. [*Gives* MR. POSKET *the letter.*]

MR. POSKET.

[*Reading in a dazed sort of a way.*] "Hotel des Princes, Meek Street, W. Dear Sir,—Unless you

drop in and settle your arrears, I really cannot keep your room for you any longer. Yours obediently, Achille Blond. Cecil Farringdon, Esq." Good heavens! You have a room at the Hotel des Princes!

CIS.

A room! It's little better than a coop.

MR. POSKET.

You don't occupy it?

CIS.

But my friends do. When I was at Brighton I was in with the best set—hope I always shall be. I left Brighton—nice hole I was in. You see, Guv, I didn't want my friends to make free with your house.

MR. POSKET.

Oh, didn't you?

CIS.

So I took a room at the Hotel des Princes—when I want to put a man up he goes there. You see, Guv, it's *you* I've been considering more than myself.

MR. POSKET.

But you are a mere child.

CIS.

A fellow is just as old as he feels. I feel no end of a man. Hush, they're coming down! I'm off to tell Wyke about the rickety four-wheeler.

MR. POSKET.

Cis, Cis! Your mother will discover I have been out.

CIS.

Oh, I forgot, you're married, aren't you?

MR. POSKET.

Married!

CIS.

Say you are going to the club.

MR. POSKET.

But that's not the truth, sir!

CIS.

Yes it is. We'll pop in at the club on our way, and you can give me a bitters. [*Goes out.*

MR. POSKET.

Good gracious, what a boy! Hotel des Princes, Meek Street! What shall I do? Tell his mother? Why, it would turn her hair grey. If I could only get a quiet word with this Mr. Achille Blond, I could put a stop to everything. That is my best course, not to lose a moment in rescuing the child from his boyish indiscretion. Yes, I must go with Cis to Meek Street.

Enter AGATHA POSKET *and* CHARLOTTE, *elegantly dressed.*

AGATHA POSKET.

Have you sent for a cab, Æneas?

MR. POSKET.

Cis is looking after that.

AGATHA POSKET.

Poor Cis! How late we keep him up.

CIS *comes in.*

CIS.

Wyke has gone for a cab, ma dear.

AGATHA POSKET.

Thank you, Cis darling.

CIS.

If you'll excuse me, I'll go to my room. I've another bad headache coming on.

AGATHA POSKET.

[*Kissing him.*] Run along, my boy.

CIS.

Good-night, ma. Good-night, Aunt Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE.

Good-night, Cis.

AGATHA POSKET.

[*To herself.*] I wish the cab would come.

[AGATHA POSKET *and* CHARLOTTE *look out of the window.*

CIS.

[*At the door.*] Ahem! Good-night, Guv.

MR. POSKET.

You've told a story—two, sir! You said you were going up to your room.

CIS.

So I am—to dress.

MR. POSKET.

You said you had a bad headache coming on.

CIS.

So I have, Guv. I always get a bad headache at the Hotel des Princes. [*Goes out.*

MR. POSKET.

Oh, what a boy!

AGATHA POSKET.

[*To herself.*] When will that cab come?

MR. POSKET.

Ahem! My pet, the idea has struck me that, as you are going out, it would not be a bad notion for me to pop into my club.

AGATHA POSKET.

The club! You were there last night.

MR. POSKET.

I know, my darling. Many men look in at their clubs every night.

AGATHA POSKET.

A nice example for Cis, truly! I particularly desire that you should remain at home to-night, Æneas.

MR. POSKET.

[*To himself.*] Oh, dear me!

CHARLOTTE.

[*To* AGATHA POSKET.] Why not let him go to the club, Agatha?

AGATHA POSKET.

He might meet Colonel Lukyn there.

CHARLOTTE.

If Colonel Lukyn is there we shan't find him in Cork Street!

AGATHA POSKET.

Then we follow him to the club.

CHARLOTTE.

Ladies never call at a club.

AGATHA POSKET.

Such things have been known.

WYKE *enters.*

WYKE.

[*Grinning behind his hand.*] The cab is coming, ma'am.

AGATHA POSKET.

Coming? Why didn't you bring it with you?

WYKE.

I walk quicker than the cab, ma'am. It's a good horse, slow, but very certain.

AGATHA POSKET.

We will come down.

WYKE.

[*To himself.*] Just what the horse has done. [*To* AGATHA POSKET.] Yes, ma'am. [WYKE *goes out.*

AGATHA POSKET.

Good-night, Æneas.

MR. POSKET.

[*Nervously.*] I wish you would allow me to go to the club, my pet.

AGATHA POSKET.

Æneas, I am surprised at your obstinacy. It is so very different from my first husband.

MR. POSKET.

Really, Agatha, I am shocked. I presume the late Mr. Farringdon occasionally used his clubs.

AGATHA POSKET.

Indian clubs. Indian clubs are good for the liver, London clubs are not. Good-night!

MR. POSKET.

I'll see you to your cab, Agatha.

AGATHA POSKET.

No, thank you.

MR. POSKET.

Upon my word!

CHARLOTTE.

[*To* AGATHA POSKET.] Why not?

AGATHA POSKET.

He would want to give the direction to the cab-man!

CHARLOTTE.

The first tiff. [*To* MR. POSKET.] Good-night, Mr. Posket.

MR. POSKET.

Good-night, Miss Verrinder.

AGATHA POSKET.

[*To* MR. POSKET.] Have you any message for Lady Jenkins ?

MR. POSKET.

Confound Lady Jenkins.

AGATHA POSKET.

I will deliver your message in the presence of Sir George, who, I may remind you, is the permanent Secretary at the Home Office.

[AGATHA POSKET *and* CHARLOTTE *go out ;*
MR. POSKET *paces up and down excitedly.*

MR. POSKET.

Gurrh ? I'm not to go to the club ! I set a bad example to Cis ! Ha ! ha ! I am different from her first husband. Yes, I am—I'm alive for one thing. I—I—I—I—I'm dashed if I don't go out with the boy.

CIS.

[*Putting his head in at the door.*] Coast clear, Guv ? All right.

Enter CIS, *in fashionable evening dress, carrying* MR. POSKET'S *overcoat and hat.*

CIS.

Here are your hat and overcoat.

MR. POSKET.

Where on earth did you get that dress suit?

CIS.

Mum's the word, Guv. Brighton tailor—six months' credit. He promised to send in the bill to you, so the mater won't know. [*Putting* MR. POSKET'S *hat on his head.*] By jove, Guv, don't my togs show you up?

MR. POSKET.

I won't go, I won't go. I've never met such a boy before.

CIS.

[*Proceeds to help him with his overcoat.*] Mind your arm, Guv. You've got your hand in a pocket. No, no—that's a tear in the lining. That's it.

MR. POSKET.

I forbid you to go out!

CIS.

Yes, Guv. And I forbid you to eat any of those devilled oysters we shall get at the Hotel des Princes. Now you're right!

MR. POSKET.

I am not right!

CIS.

Oh, I forgot! [*He pulls out a handful of loose money.*] I found this money in your desk, Guv. You had better take it out with you; you may want it. Here you are—gold, silver, and coppers. [*He empties the money into* MR. POSKET'S *overcoat pocket.*] One last precaution, and then we're off.

[*Goes to the writing-table, and writes on a half-sheet of note-paper.*

MR. POSKET.

I shall take a turn round the Square, and then come home again! I will not be influenced by a mere child! A man of my responsible position—a magistrate—supping slily at the Hotel des Princes, in Meek Street—it's horrible.

CIS.

Now, then—we'll creep downstairs quietly so as not to bring Wyke from his pantry. [*Giving* MR. POSKET *paper.*] You stick that up prominently, while I blow out the candles. [CIS *blows out the candles on the piano.*

MR. POSKET.

[*Reading.*] "Your master and Mr. Cecil Farringdon are going to bed. Don't disturb them." I will not be a partner to any written document. This is untrue.

CIS.

No, it isn't—we are going to bed when we come home. Make haste, Guv.

MR. POSKET.

Oh, what a boy.

[*Pinning the paper on to the curtain.*

CIS.

[*Turning down the lamp, and watching* MR. POSKET.] Hallo, Guv! hallo! You're an old hand at this sort of game, are you?

MR. POSKET.

How dare you!

CIS.

[*Taking* MR. POSKET'S *arm.*] Now, then, don't breathe.

MR. POSKET.

[*Quite demoralised.*] Cis! Cis! Wait a minute—wait a minute!

CIS.

Hold up, Guv. [WYKE *enters.*] Oh, bother!

WYKE.

[*To* MR. POSKET.] Going out, sir?

MR. POSKET.

[*Struggling to be articulate.*] No—yes—that is—partially—half round the Square, and possibly—er—um—back again. [*To* CIS.] Oh, you bad boy!

WYKE.

[*Coolly going up to the paper on curtains.*] Shall I take this down now, sir?

MR. POSKET.

[*Quietly to* CIS.] I'm in an awful position! What am I to do?

CIS.

Do as I do—tip him.

MR. POSKET.

What!

CIS.

Tip him.

MR. POSKET.

Oh, yes—yes. Where's my money?

[CIS *takes two coins out of* MR. POSKET'S *pocket and gives them to him without looking at them.*

CIS.

[*To* MR. POSKET.] Give him that.

MR. POSKET.

Yes.

CIS.

And say—"Wyke, you want a new umbrella—buy a very good one. Your mistress has a latch-key, so go to bed."

MR. POSKET.

Wyke!

WYKE.

Yes, sir.

MR. POSKET.

[*Giving him money.*] Go to bed—buy a very good one. Your mistress has a latch-key—so—so you want a new umbrella!

WYKE.

All right, sir. You can depend on me. Are you well muffled up, sir? Mind you take care of him, Master Cis.

CIS.

[*Supporting* MR. POSKET; MR. POSKET *groaning softly.*] Capital, Guv, capital. Are you hungry?

MR. POSKET.

Hungry! You're a wicked boy. I've told a falsehood.

CIS.

No, you haven't, Guv—he really does want a new umbrella.

MR. POSKET.

Does he, Cis? Does he? Thank heaven!

[*They go out.*

WYKE.

[*Looking at money.*] Here! What, twopence! [*Throws the coins down in disgust.*] I'll tell the missus.

END OF THE FIRST ACT.

THE SECOND ACT

The scene is a supper-room at the Hotel des Princes, Meek Street, with two doors—the one leading into an adjoining room, the other into a passage—and a window opening on to a balcony.

ISIDORE, *a French waiter, is showing in* CIS *and* MR. POSKET.

CIS.

Come on, Guv—come on. How are you, Isidore?

ISIDORE.

I beg your pardon—I am quite well, and so are you, zank you.

CIS.

I want a pretty little light supper for myself and my friend, Mr. Skinner.

ISIDORE.

Mr. Skinner.

MR. POSKET.

[*To* CIS.] Skinner! Is some one else coming?

CIS.

No, no. You're Skinner.

MR. POSKET.

Oh!

[*Wanders round the room.*

CIS.

Mr. Skinner, of the Stock Exchange. What have you ready?

ISIDORE.

[*In an undertone to* CIS.] I beg your pardon—very good—but Monsieur Blond he say to me, "Isidore, listen now; if Mr. Farringdon he come here, you say, I beg your pardon, you are a nice gentleman, but will you pay your little account when it is quite convenient, before you leave the house at once."

CIS.

Quite so, there's no difficulty about that. What's the bill?

ISIDORE.

[*Gives the bill.*] I beg your pardon. Eight pounds four shillings.

CIS.

Phew! Here go my winnings from old Bullamy and the Guv. [*Counting out money.*] Two pounds short. [*Turning to* MR. POSKET, *who is carefully examining the scratches on the mirrors.*] Skinner! Skinner!

MR. POSKET.

Visitors evidently scratch their names on the mirrors. Dear me! Surely this is a spurious title—"Lottie, Duchess of Fulham!" How very curious!

CIS.

Skinner, got any money with you?

MR. POSKET.

Yes, Cis, my boy. [*Feels for his money.*

CIS.

You always keep it in that pocket, Skinner.

MR. POSKET.

[*Taking out money.*] Oh, yes.

[CIS *takes two sovereigns from* MR. POSKET *and gives the amount of his bill to* ISIDORE, *who goes to the sideboard to count out change.*

CIS.

No putting the change to bed, Isidore.

MR. POSKET.

What's that?

CIS.

Putting the change to bed! Isidore will show you. [*To* ISIDORE, *who comes to them with the change and the bill on a plate.*] Isidore, show Mr. Skinner how you put silver to bed.

ISIDORE.

Oh, Mr. Farringdon, I beg your pardon—no, no!

MR. POSKET.

It would be most instructive.

ISIDORE.

Very good. [*Goes to the table, upon which he puts plate.*] Say I have to give you change sixteen shillings.

MR. POSKET.

Certainly.

ISIDORE.

Very good. Before I bring it to you I slip a little half-crown under the bill—so. Then I put what is left on the top of the bill, and I say, "I beg your pardon, your change." You take it, you give me two shillings for myself, and all is right.

MR. POSKET.

[*Counting the silver on the bill with the end of his glasses.*] Yes, but suppose I count the silver, it is half-a-crown short!

ISIDORE.

Then I say, "I beg your pardon, how dare you say that?" Then I do so. [*He pulls the bill from the plate.*] Then I say, "The bill is eight pounds four shillings [*handing the plate*], count again."

MR. POSKET.

Ah, of course, it's all right now.

ISIDORE.

Very good, then you give me five shillings for doubting me. Do it, do it.

MR. POSKET.

[*In a daze, giving him the five shillings.*] Like this?

ISIDORE.

Yes, like that. [*Slipping the money into his pocket.*] I beg your pardon—thank you. [*Handing* CIS *the rest of the change.*] Your change, Mr. Farringdon.

CIS.

Oh, I say, Isidore.

BLOND, *a fat, middle-aged French hotel-keeper, enters with a letter in his hand.*

ISIDORE.

Monsieur Blond.

BLOND.

Good evening, Mr. Farringdon.

ISIDORE.

[*Quietly to* BLOND.] Ze bill is all right.

CIS.

Good evening. [*Introducing* MR. POSKET.] My friend, Mr. Harvey Skinner, of the Stock Exchange.

BLOND.

Very pleased to see you. [*To* CIS.] Are you going to enjoy yourselves ?

CIS.

Rather.

BLOND.

You usually eat in this room, but you don't mind giving it up for to-night—now, do you ?

CIS.

Oh, Achille !

BLOND.

Come, come, to please me. A cab has just brought a letter from an old customer of mine, a gentleman

I haven't seen for over twenty years, who wants to sup with a friend in this room to-night. It's quite true. [*Giving* Cis *a letter.*]

Cis.

[*Reading to himself.*] "19A, Cork Street. Dear Blond,—Fresh, or rather, stale from India—want to sup with my friend, Captain Vale, to-night, at my old table in my old room. Must do this for Auld Lang Syne. Yours, Alexander Lukyn." [*To* Blond.] Oh, let him have it. Where will you put us?

Blond.

You shall have the best room in the house, the one next to this. This room—pah! Come with me. [*To* Mr. Posket.] Have you known Mr. Farringdon for a long time?

Mr. Posket.

No, no. Not very long.

Blond.

Ah, he is a fine fellow—Mr. Farringdon. Now, if you please. You can go through this door.

[*Wheels sofa away and unlocks the door.*

Cis.

[*To* Mr. Posket.] You'll look better after a glass or two of Pommery, Guv.

Mr. Posket.

No, no, Cis—now, no champagne.

CIS.

No champagne, not for my friend, Harvey Skinner! Come, Guv—dig me in the ribs—like this. [*Digging him in the ribs.*] Chuck!

MR. POSKET.

[*Shrinking.*] Oh, don't!

CIS.

And say, Hey! Go on, Guv.

MR. POSKET.

I can't—I can't. I don't know what it may mean.

CIS.

[*Digging him in the ribs again.*] Go on—ch-uck!

MR. POSKET.

What, like this? [*Returning the dig.*] Ch-uck.

CIS.

That's it, that's it. Ha, ha! You are going it, Guv.

MR. POSKET.

Am I, Cis? Am I? [*Waving his arm.*] Hey!

CIS AND MR. POSKET.

Hey!

CIS

Ha, ha! Come on! Serve the supper, Achille.

BLOND.

Ah! he is a grand fellow, Mr. Farringdon. [CIS *and* Mr. POSKET *go into the other room.*] [*To* ISIDORE.] Replace the *canapé.*

[*There is a sharp knock at the other door.* BLOND *follows* CIS *and* MR. POSKET *into the other room, then locks the door on the inside.*

ISIDORE.

Come in, please.

COLONEL LUKYN *and* CAPTAIN VALE *enter the room.* LUKYN *is a portly, grey-haired, good-looking military man;* VALE *is pale-faced and heavy-eyed, while his manner is languid and dejected.*

LUKYN.

This is the room. Come in, Vale. This is my old supper-room—I haven't set foot here for over twenty years. By George, I hope to sup here for another twenty.

VALE.

[*Dejectedly.*] Do you? In less than that, unless I am lucky enough to fall in some foreign set-to, I shall be in Kensal Green.

LUKYN.

[*Looking round the room sentimentally.*] Twenty years ago! Confound 'em, they've painted it.

VALE.

My people have eight shelves in the Catacombs at Kensal Green.

LUKYN.

Nonsense, man, nonsense. You're a little low. Waiter, take our coats.

VALE.

Don't check me, Lukyn. My shelf is four from the bottom.

LUKYN.

You'll forget the number of your shelf before you're half way through your oysters.

VALE.

[*Shaking his head.*] An oyster merely reminds me of my own particular shell.

[ISIDORE *begins to remove* VALE'S *coat.*

LUKYN.

Ha, ha! Ha, ha!

VALE.

Don't, Lukyn, don't. [*In an undertone to* LUKYN.] It's very good of you, but, by Jove, my heart is broken. [*To* ISIDORE.] Mind my flower, waiter, confound you. [*He adjusts flower in his button-hole.*

ISIDORE.

You have ordered supper, sir?

LUKYN.

Yes, on the back of my note to Mr. Blond. Serve it at once.

ISIDORE.

I beg your pardon, sir, at once. [*He goes out.*

LUKYN.

So, you've been badly treated by a woman, eh, Vale?

VALE.

Shockingly. Between man and man, a Miss Verrinder—Charlotte. [*Turning away.*] Excuse me, Lukyn.

[*Produces a folded silk handerchief, shakes it out, and gently blows his nose.*

LUKYN.

[*Lighting a cigarette.*] Certainly—certainly—does you great credit. Pretty woman?

VALE.

Oh, lovely! A most magnificent set of teeth. All real, as far as I can ascertain.

LUKYN.

No?

VALE.

Fact.

LUKYN.

Great loss;—have a cigarette.

VALE.

[*Taking case from* LUKYN.] Parascho's?

LUKYN.

Yes. Was she—full grown?

VALE.

[*Lighting his cigarette.*] Just perfection. She rides eight-stone fifteen, and I have lost her, Lukyn. Beautiful tobacco.

LUKYN.

What finished it?

VALE.

She gave a man a pair of worked slippers three days after our engagement.

LUKYN.

No?

VALE.

Fact. You remember Bristow—Gordon Bristow?

LUKYN.

Perfectly. Best fellow in the world.

VALE.

He wears them.

LUKYN.

Villain! Will you begin with a light wine, or go right on to the champagne?

VALE.

By Jove, it's broken my heart, old fellow. I'll go right on to the champagne, please. Lukyn, I shall make you my executor.

LUKYN.

Pooh! You'll outlive me! Why don't they bring the supper? My heart has been broken like yours.

It was broken first in Ireland in '55. It was broken again in London in '61, but in 1870 it was smashed in Calcutta, by a married lady that time.

VALE.

A married lady?

LUKYN.

Yes, my late wife. Talk about broken hearts, my boy, when you've won your lady, not when you've lost her. [*Enter* ISIDORE *with a tray of supper things.*] The supper. [*To* VALE.] Hungry?

VALE.

[*Mournfully.*] Very.

Enter BLOND, *with an envelope.*

BLOND.

Colonel Lukyn.

LUKYN.

Ah, Blond, how are you? Not a day older. What have you got there?

BLOND.

[*Quietly to* LUKYN *in an undertone.*] Two ladies, Colonel, downstairs in a cab, must see you for a few minutes alone.

LUKYN.

Good gracious! Excuse me, Vale. [*Takes the envelope from* BLOND, *and opens it: reading the enclosed card.*] Mrs. Posket—Mrs. Posket! "Mrs. Posket entreats Colonel Lukyn to see her for five minutes

upon a matter of urgent necessity, and free from observation." By George! Posket must be ill in bed —I thought he looked seedy last night. [*To* BLOND.] Of course—of course. Say I'll come down.

BLOND.

It is raining outside. I had better ask them up.

LUKYN.

Do—do. I'll get Captain Vale to step into another room. Be quick. Tell 'em I am quite alone.

BLOND.

Yes, Colonel. [*Hurries out.*

CIS.

[*In the next room rattling glasses and calling.*] Waiter! Waiter! Waiter-r-r! Where the deuce are you?

ISIDORE.

Coming, sir, coming. I beg your pardon.

[*Bustles out.*

LUKYN.

My dear Vale, I am dreadfully sorry to bother you. Two ladies, one the wife of a very old friend of mine, have followed me here and want half a dozen words with me alone. I am in your hands—how can I manage it?

VALE.

My dear fellow, don't mention it. Let me go into another room.

LUKYN.

Thank you, very much. You're so hungry too. Where's the waiter? Confound him, he's gone!

VALE.

All right. I'll pop in here.

[*He passes behind sofa and tries the door leading into the other room.*

CIS.

[*Within.*] What do you want? Who's there?

VALE.

Occupied—never mind—I'll find my way somewhere. [*There is a knock;* VALE *draws back.*

BLOND.

[*Without.*] Colonel, are you alone? The ladies.

LUKYN.

One moment. Deuce take it, Vale! The ladies don't want to be seen. By George—I remember. There's a little balcony to that window, step out for a few moments—keep quiet—I shan't detain you—it's nothing important—husband must have had a fit or something.

VALE.

Oh, certainly!

LUKYN.

Good fellow—here's your hat.

[*In his haste he fetches his own hat.*

BLOND.

[*Outside, knocking.*] Colonel, Colonel!

LUKYN.

One moment. [*Giving his hat to* VALE.] Awfully sorry. You're so hungry too. [VALE *puts on the hat, which is much too large for him.*] Ah, that's my hat.

VALE.

My dear Lukyn—don't mention it.

[*Opening the window and going out.*

LUKYN.

[*Drawing the curtain over the recess.*] Just room for him to stand like a man in a sentry-box. Come in, Blond.

BLOND *shows in* AGATHA *and* CHARLOTTE, *both wearing veils.*

AGATHA POSKET.

[*Agitated.*] Oh, Colonel Lukyn !

LUKYN.

Pray compose yourself, pray compose yourself !

AGATHA POSKET.

What will you think ?

LUKYN.

That I am perfectly enchanted.

AGATHA POSKET.

Thank you. [*Pointing to* CHARLOTTE.] My sister.

[LUKYN *and* CHARLOTTE *bow.*

LUKYN.

Be seated. Blond? [*Softly to him.*] Keep the waiter out till I ring—that's all.

[*The loud pattering of rain is heard.*

BLOND.

Yes, Colonel.

LUKYN.

Good gracious, Blond! What's that?

BLOND.

The rain outside. It is cats and dogs.

LUKYN.

[*Horrified.*] By George, is it? [*To himself, looking towards window.*] Poor devil! [*To* BLOND.] There isn't any method of getting off that balcony, is there?

BLOND.

No—unless by getting on to it.

LUKYN.

What do you mean?

BLOND.

It is not at all safe. Don't use it.

[LUKYN *stands horror-stricken*; BLOND *goes out. Heavy rain is heard.*

LUKYN.

[*After some nervous glances at the window, wiping perspiration from his forehead.*] I am honoured, Mrs. Posket, by this visit—though for a moment—I can't imagine——

AGATHA POSKET.

Colonel Lukyn, we drove to Cork Street to your lodgings, and there your servant told us you were supping at the Hotel des Princes, with a friend. No one will be shown into this room while we are here?

LUKYN.

No—we—ah—shall not be disturbed. [*To himself.*] Good heavens, suppose I never see him alive again!

AGATHA POSKET.

[*Sighing wearily.*] Ah!

LUKYN.

I'm afraid you've come to tell me Posket is ill.

AGATHA POSKET.

I—no—my husband is at home.

[*A sharp gust of wind is heard with the rain.*

LUKYN.

Lord forgive me! I've killed him.

AGATHA POSKET.

[*With horror.*] Colonel Lukyn!

LUKYN.

Madam!

AGATHA POSKET.

Indeed Mr. Posket is at home.

LUKYN.

[*Glancing at the window.*] Is he? I wish we all were.

AGATHA POSKET.

[*To herself.*] Sunstroke evidently. Poor fellow! [*To* LUKYN.] I assure you my husband is at home, quite well, and by this time sleeping soundly.

[CIS *and* MR. POSKET *are heard laughing in the next room.*

ISIDORE.

[*Within.*] You are two funny gentlemen, I beg your pardon.

AGATHA POSKET.

[*Startled.*] What is that?

LUKYN.

In the next room. [*Raps at the door.*] Hush—hush, hush!

CHARLOTTE.

Get it over, Aggy, and let us go home. I am so awfully hungry.

LUKYN.

[*Peering through the curtains.*] It is still bearing him. What's his weight? Surely he can't scale over ten stone. Lord, how wet he is!

AGATHA POSKET.

Colonel Lukyn!

LUKYN.

[*Leaving the window sharply.*] Madam, command me!

AGATHA POSKET.

Colonel Lukyn, we knew each other at Baroda twenty years ago.

LUKYN.

When I look at you, impossible.

AGATHA POSKET.

Ah, then you mustn't look at me.

LUKYN.

Equally impossible.

CHARLOTTE.

[*To herself.*] Oh, I feel quite out of this.

AGATHA POSKET.

You were at my little boy's christening?

LUKYN.

[*Absently.*] Yes—yes—certainly.

AGATHA POSKET.

You remember what a fine little fellow he was.

LUKYN.

[*Thoughtfully.*] Not a pound over ten stone.

AGATHA POSKET.

Colonel Lukyn!

LUKYN.

I beg your pardon, yes—I was at the christening of your boy.

AGATHA POSKET.

[*To herself.*] One of the worst cases of sunstroke I have ever known.

LUKYN.

I remember the child very well. Has he still got that absurd mug?

AGATHA POSKET.

Colonel Lukyn!

LUKYN.

Madam!

AGATHA POSKET.

My child is, and always was—perfect.

LUKYN.

You misunderstand me! I was his godfather; I gave him a silver cup.

AGATHA POSKET.

Oh, do excuse me. How did I become acquainted with such a vulgar expression? I don't know where I pick up my slang. It must be through loitering at shop windows. Oh, oh, oh!

LUKYN.

Pray compose yourself. I'll leave you for a moment.

[*Going to the window.*

AGATHA POSKET.

[*To* CHARLOTTE.] How shall I begin, Charley?

CHARLOTTE.

Make a bold plunge, do! The odour of cooking here, to a hungry woman, is maddening.

[VALE *softly opens the window and comes into the recess, but remains concealed by the curtain.*

VALE.

[*To himself.*] This is too bad of Lukyn! I'm wet to the skin and frightfully hungry! Who the deuce are these women?

AGATHA POSKET.

Colonel Lukyn!

LUKYN.

Madam. [*Listening.*] No crash yet.

AGATHA POSKET.

[*Impulsively laying her hand upon his arm.*] Friend of twenty years! I will be quite candid with you. You are going to dine with us, to-morrow?

LUKYN.

Madam, I will repay your candour as it deserves. I am.

AGATHA POSKET.

My husband knows of your acquaintance with the circumstances of my first marriage. I know what men are. When the women leave the dinner-table, men become retrospective. Now, to-morrow night, over dessert, I beg you not to give my husband dates.

LUKYN.

Eh?

AGATHA POSKET.

Keep anything like dates from him.

LUKYN.

Mustn't eat stone fruit?

AGATHA POSKET.

No, I mean years, months, days, dates connected with my marriage with Mr. Farringdon.

LUKYN.

Dear me, sore subject!

AGATHA POSKET.

I will be more than candid with you. My present husband, having a very short vacation in the discharge of his public duties, wooed me but for three weeks; you, who have in your time courted and married, know the material of which that happy period is made up. The future is all-engrossing to the man; the presents—I mean the present, a joyous dream to the woman. But in dealing with my past I met with more than ordinary difficulties.

LUKYN.

Don't see why—late husband died a natural death —wasn't stood on a balcony or anything.

AGATHA POSKET.

Colonel Lukyn, you know I was six-and-thirty at the time of my recent marriage!

LUKYN.

You surprise me!

AGATHA POSKET.

You know it! Be frank, Lukyn! Am I not six-and-thirty?

LUKYN.

You are.

AGATHA POSKET.

Very well, then. In a three weeks' engagement how was it possible for me to deal with the various episodes of six-and-thirty years? The past may be pleasant, golden, beautiful—but one may have too much of a good thing.

LUKYN.

[*To himself.*] I am in that position now.

AGATHA POSKET.

The man who was courting me was seeking relaxation from the discharge of multifarious responsibilities. How could I tax an already wearied attention with the recital of the events of thirty-six years?

LUKYN.

What did you do?

AGATHA POSKET.

Out of consideration for the man I loved, I sacrificed five years of happy girlhood—told him I was but one-and-thirty—that I had been married only fifteen years previously—that my boy was but fourteen!

LUKYN.

By George, madam, and am I to subscribe to all this?

AGATHA POSKET.

I only ask you to avoid the question of dates.

LUKYN.

But, at a man's dinner-table——

AGATHA POSKET.

You need not spoil a man's dinner. Not only a man's—but a woman's! Lukyn, Lukyn! Promise!

LUKYN.

Give me a second to think.

[LUKYN, *turning away, discovers* CHARLOTTE *in the act of lifting the covers from the dishes and inspecting the contents.*

LUKYN.

Ah, devilled oysters!

CHARLOTTE.

Oh!

[*Drops dish-cover with a crash, and runs over to the table and speaks to* AGATHA POSKET.

LUKYN.

Don't go—pray look at 'em again—wish I could persuade you to taste them. What am I to do? Shall I promise? Poor Posket! If I don't promise she'll cry and won't go home. The oysters are nearly cold—cold! What must *he* be! [*Drawing aside the curtain, and not seeing* VALE, *he staggers back.*] Gone—and without a cry—brave fellow, brave fellow!

AGATHA POSKET.

Colonel Lukyn.

LUKYN.

Decay of stamina in the army—pah! The young 'uns are worthy of our best days.

AGATHA POSKET.

Colonel Lukyn, will you promise?

LUKYN.

Promise? Anything, my dear madam, anything.

AGATHA POSKET.

Ah, thank you! May I ask you to see us to our cab?

LUKYN.

Certainly! Thank heaven, they're going!

AGATHA POSKET.

[*To* CHARLOTTE.] It's all right; come along!

CHARLOTTE.

[*To* AGATHA POSKET.] Oh, those oysters look so nice.

LUKYN.

[*To himself.*] Stop! In my trouble, I am forgetting even the commonest courtesies to these ladies. [*To* AGATHA POSKET.] You have a long journey before you. I am sure your husband would not forgive me for letting you face such weather unprepared. Let me recommend an oyster or two and a thimbleful of champagne.

AGATHA POSKET.

No, thank you, Colonel Lukyn.

CHARLOTTE.

[*To* AGATHA POSKET.] Say yes. I'm starving.

LUKYN.

As you please. [*To himself.*] I knew they'd refuse. I've done my duty.

CHARLOTTE.

[*To* AGATHA POSKET.] I was in the train till seven o'clock. Wait till you're a *bonâ-fide* traveller—accept.

AGATHA POSKET.

Ahem! Colonel, the fact is my poor sister has been travelling all day and is a little exhausted.

LUKYN.

[*Horrified.*] You don't mean to say you're going to give me the inestimable pleasure. [CHARLOTTE *looks across at him, nodding and smiling.*] I am delighted.

[CHARLOTTE *sits hungrily at table*; LUKYN *fetches a bottle of champagne from the sideboard.*

AGATHA POSKET.

[*To* CHARLOTTE.] Charlotte, I am surprised.

CHARLOTTE.

[*To* AGATHA POSKET.] Nonsense, the best people come here. Some of them have left their names on the mirrors.

VALE.

[*Behind the curtain.*] This is much too bad of Lukyn. What are they doing now? [LUKYN *draws the cork.*] Confound it, they're having my supper!

[LUKYN *pours out wine.*

CHARLOTTE.

Why doesn't he give me something to eat?

[*There is a clatter of knives and forks heard from the other room, then a burst of laughter from* CIS.

AGATHA POSKET.

[*Starting.*] Charley, hark! How strange!

CHARLOTTE.

Very. This bread is beautiful.

[CIS *is heard singing the chorus of a comic song boisterously.*

AGATHA POSKET.

Don't you recognise that voice?

CHARLOTTE.

[*Munching.*] The only voice I recognise is the voice of hunger.

AGATHA POSKET.

I am overwrought, I suppose.

[LUKYN, *with his head drooping, fetches the dish of oysters from the sideboard.*

VALE.

[*Behind the curtains.*] He has taken the oysters. I've seen him do it.

LUKYN.

The oysters.

[LUKYN *sinks into his chair at the table and leans his head upon his hand; the two women look at each other.*

CHARLOTTE.

[*To* AGATHA POSKET.] Anything wrong?

AGATHA POSKET.

Sunstroke—bad case!

CHARLOTTE.

Oh—poor fellow. [*She gently lifts the corner of the dish, sniffs, then replaces cover.*] No plates.

AGATHA POSKET.

Ask for them.

CHARLOTTE.

You ask.

AGATHA POSKET.

You're hungry.

CHARLOTTE.

You're married. Comes better from you.

VALE.

[*Behind curtains.*] This silence is terrible.

AGATHA POSKET.

[*To* LUKYN.] Ahem! Ahem!

LUKYN.

[*Looking up suddenly.*] Eh?

AGATHA POSKET.

There are no plates.

LUKYN.

No plates? No plates? It's my fault. Pardon me. Where are the plates?

[VALE, *still invisible, stretches out his hand through the curtain, takes up the plates and presents them to* LUKYN, *who recoils.*

VALE.

[*In a whisper.*] Here are the plates. Look sharp, Lukyn.

LUKYN.

Vale! safe and sound! [*He takes the plates, then grasps* VALE'S *extended hand.*] Bless you, old fellow. I'm myself again. [*Going gaily to the table with the plates.*] My dear ladies, I blush—I positively blush—I am the worst host in the world.

VALE.

[*To himself.*] By Jove, that's true.

AGATHA POSKET.

Not at all—not at all.

LUKYN.

[*Helping the ladies.*] I'll make amends, by George! You may have noticed I've been confoundedly out of sorts. That's my temperament—now up, now down. I've just taken a turn, ha, ha! Oysters.

[*Handing plate to* AGATHA POSKET.

AGATHA POSKET.

Thank you.

LUKYN.

Ah! I've passed many a happy hour in this room. The present is not the least happy.

CHARLOTTE.

[*Trying to attract his attention.*] Ahem! Ahem!

LUKYN.

[*Gazing up at the ceiling.*] My first visit to the Hotel des Princes was in the year—the year—let me think.

CHARLOTTE.

[*Whispering to* AGATHA POSKET.] Isn't he going to help me?

LUKYN.

Was it in '55?

AGATHA POSKET.

[*Quickly passing her plate over to* CHARLOTTE.] I'm not hungry.

CHARLOTTE.

You're a dear.

LUKYN.

[*Emphatically.*] It *was* in '55. I'm forgetful again —pardon me. [*He hands plate of oysters to* CHARLOTTE, *and is surprised to find her eating vigorously.*] Why, I thought I—— [*To* AGATHA POSKET.] My dear madam, a thousand apologies. [*He helps her and then*

himself.] Pah! they're cold—icy—you could skate on 'em. There's a dish of something else over there.

[*He goes to the sideboard;* VALE'S *hand is again stretched forth with the other covered dish.*

VALE.

I say, Lukyn.

LUKYN.

[*Taking the dish.*] Thanks, old fellow. [*He returns to the table and lifts the cover.*] Soles—they look tempting. If there are only some lemons! Surely they are not so brutal as to have forgotten the lemons. Where are they? [*He returns to the sideboard.*] Where are they? [*In an undertone to* VALE.] Have you seen any lemons?

AGATHA POSKET.

Pray, think less of us, Colonel Lukyn. Let me take care of you.

LUKYN.

You're very kind. I wish you would let me ring for some lemons.

[VALE'S *hand comes as before from behind the curtain to the sideboard, finds the dish of lemons, and holds it out at arm's length.*

VALE.

[*In a whisper.*] Lemons.

[AGATHA POSKET *is helping* LUKYN, *when suddenly* CHARLOTTE, *with her fork in the*

air, leans back open-mouthed, staring wildly at VALE'S *arm extended with the dish.*

CHARLOTTE.

[*In terror.*] Agatha! Agatha!

AGATHA POSKET.

Charlotte! what's the matter, Charley?

CHARLOTTE.

Agatha!

AGATHA POSKET.

You're ill, Charlotte! Surely you are not choking?

CHARLOTTE.

[*Pointing to the curtains.*] Look, look!
[*They both scream.*

LUKYN.

Don't be alarmed—I——

CHARLOTTE.
What's that?
AGATHA POSKET. } [*Together.*]
Who's that?

LUKYN.

I can explain. Don't condemn till you've heard.
I—I—— Damn it, sir, put those lemons down!

CHARLOTTE.

He calls him "Sir"—it must be a man.

LUKYN.

It is a man. I am not in a position to deny that.

AGATHA POSKET.

Really, Colonel Lukyn !

LUKYN.

It is my friend. He—he—he's merely waiting for his supper.

AGATHA POSKET.

Your friend. [*To* CHARLOTTE.] Come home, dear.

LUKYN.

Do, do hear me ! To avoid the embarrassment of your encountering a stranger, he retreated to the balcony.

AGATHA POSKET.

To the balcony ? You have shamefully compromised two trusting women, Colonel Lukyn.

LUKYN.

I would have laid down my life rather than have done so. I did lay down my friend's life.

AGATHA POSKET.

He has overheard every confidential word I have spoken to you.

LUKYN.

Hear his explanation. Why the devil don't you corroborate me, sir ?

VALE.

[*From behind the curtain.*] Certainly, I assure you I heard next to nothing.

CHARLOTTE.

[*Grasping* AGATHA POSKET'S *arm.*] Oh, Agatha!

VALE.

I didn't come in till I was exceedingly wet.

LUKYN.

[*To* AGATHA POSKET.] You hear that?

VALE.

And when I did come in——

CHARLOTTE.

[*Hysterically.*] Horace!

VALE.

I beg your pardon.

CHARLOTTE.

It's Horace, Captain Vale.

VALE.

[*Coming from behind the curtain, looking terribly wet.*] Charlotte—Miss Verrinder.

CHARLOTTE.

What are you doing here? What a fright you look.

VALE.

What am I doing here, Miss Verrinder? Really, Lukyn, your conduct calls for some little explanation.

LUKYN.

My conduct, sir?

VALE.

You make some paltry excuse to turn me out in the rain while you entertain a lady who you know has very recently broken my heart.

LUKYN.

I didn't know anything of the kind.

VALE.

I told you, Colonel Lukyn—this isn't the conduct of an officer and a gentleman.

LUKYN.

Whose isn't, yours or mine?

VALE.

Mine. I mean yours.

LUKYN.

You are in the presence of ladies, sir; take off my hat.

VALE.

I beg your pardon. I didn't know I had it on.

[*He throws the hat away, and the two men exchange angry words.*

CHARLOTTE.

He's a very good-looking fellow; you don't see a man at his best when he's wet through.

AGATHA POSKET.

[*To* LUKYN.] Colonel Lukyn, do you ever intend to send for a cab?

LUKYN.

Certainly, madam.

VALE.

One moment. I have some personal explanation to exchange with Miss Verrinder.

CHARLOTTE.

[*To* AGATHA POSKET.] The slippers. [*To* VALE.] I am quite ready, Captain Vale.

VALE.

Thank you. Colonel Lukyn, will you oblige me by stepping out on to that balcony ?

LUKYN.

Certainly not, sir.

VALE.

You're afraid of the wet, Colonel Lukyn ; you are no soldier.

LUKYN.

You know better, sir. As a matter of fact, that balcony can't bear a man like me.

VALE.

Which shows that inanimate objects have a great deal of common-sense, sir.

LUKYN.

You don't prove it in your own instance, Captain Vale.

VALE.

That's a verbal quibble, sir. [*They talk angrily.*

AGATHA POSKET.

[*To* CHARLOTTE.] It's frightfully late. Tell him to write to you.

CHARLOTTE.

I must speak to him to-night; life is too short for letters.

AGATHA POSKET.

Then he can telegraph.

CHARLOTTE.

Half-penny a word and he has nothing but his pay.

AGATHA POSKET.

Very well, then, Lady Jenkins has a telephone. I'll take you there to tea to-morrow. If he loves you, tell him to ring up 1338091.

CHARLOTTE.

You thoughtful angel!

LUKYN.

Mrs. Posket—Miss Verrinder—ahem—we——

VALE.

Colonel Lukyn and myself——

LUKYN.

Captain Vale and I fear that we have been betrayed, in a moment of——

VALE.

Natural irritation.

LUKYN.

Natural irritation, into the atrocious impropriety of differing——

VALE.

Before ladies.

LUKYN.

Charming ladies——

VALE.

We beg your pardon—Lukyn!

LUKYN.

Vale. [*They grasp hands.*] Mrs. Posket, I am now going out to hail a cab.

AGATHA POSKET.

Pray do.

LUKYN.

Miss Verrinder, the process will occupy five minutes.

VALE.

[*Giving his hat to* LUKYN.] Lukyn, I return your kindness—my hat.

LUKYN.

Thank you, my boy.

[LUKYN *puts on* VALE'S *hat, which is much too small for him. As he is going out there is a knock at the door; he opens it:* BLOND *is outside.*

BLOND.

Colonel, it is ten minutes past the time of closing, may I ask you to dismiss your party?

LUKYN.

Pooh! Isn't this a free country? [*He goes out.*

BLOND.

Yes, you are free to go home, Colonel. I shall get into trouble. [*Following him out.*

CHARLOTTE.

[*To* AGATHA POSKET.] I'll have the first word. Really, Captain Vale, I'm surprised at you.

VALE.

There was a happy time, Miss Verrinder, when I might have been surprised at you.

CHARLOTTE.

A few hours ago it was—"By Jove, all is over." Now I find you with a bosom friend enjoying devilled oysters.

VALE.

I beg your pardon, I find you enjoying devilled oysters.

CHARLOTTE.

Horace Vale, you forget you have forfeited the right to exercise any control over my diet.

VALE.

One would think I had broken off our engagement.

CHARLOTTE.

If you have not, who has? I have your letter saying all is over between us. [*Putting her handkerchief to her eyes.*] That letter will be stamped to-morrow at Somerset House. I know how to protect myself.

VALE.

Charlotte, can you explain your conduct with Gordon Bristow?

CHARLOTTE.

I could if I chose; a young lady can explain anything.

VALE.

But he is showing your gift to our fellows all over the place.

CHARLOTTE.

It was a debt of honour. He laid me a box of gloves to a pair of slippers about "Forked Lightning" for the Regimental Cup, and "Forked Lightning" went tender at the heel. I couldn't come to you with debts hanging over me. [*Crying.*] I'm too conscientious.

VALE.

By Jove, I've been a brute.

CHARLOTTE.

Y-y-yes.

VALE.

Can you forget I ever wrote that letter?

CHARLOTTE.

That must be a question of time. [*She lays her head on his shoulder and then removes it.*] How damp you are. [*She puts her handkerchief upon his shoulder, and replaces her head. She moves his arm gradually up and arranges it round her shoulder.*] If you went on anyhow every time I discharged an obligation, we should be most unhappy.

VALE.

I promise you I won't mention Bristow's slippers again. By Jove, I won't--there.

CHARLOTTE.

Very well, then, if you do that I'll give you my word I won't pay any more debts before our marriage.

VALE.

My darling!

[*About to embrace him, but remembering that he is wet.*

CHARLOTTE.

No—no—you are too damp.

ISIDORE.

[*Outside.*] I beg your pardon, it is a quarter of an hour over our time.

[AGATHA POSKET *has been sitting on the sofa; suddenly she starts, listening intently.*

MR. POSKET.

[*Outside.*] I know—I know. I'm going directly I can get the boy away.

AGATHA POSKET.

[*To herself.*] Æneas!

CIS.

[*Outside.*] All right, Guv, you finish your bottle.

AGATHA POSKET.

My boy.

ISIDORE.

[*Outside.*] Gentlemen, come—come.

AGATHA POSKET.

[*To herself.*] Miserable deceiver! This, then, is the club, and the wretched man conspires to drag my boy down to his own awful level. What shall I do? I daren't make myself known here. I know; I'll hurry home, and if I reach there before Æneas, which I shall do, I'll sit up for him.

LUKYN *returns.*

AGATHA POSKET.

Is the cab at the door?

LUKYN.

It is.

AGATHA POSKET.

Charlotte! Charlotte! [*Drawing her veil down.*

CHARLOTTE.

I'm ready, dear. [*To* VALE.] Married sisters are always a little thoughtless.

VALE.

[*Offering his arm.*] Permit me.

LUKYN.

[*Offering his arm to* AGATHA POSKET.] My dear madam.

They are all four about to leave when BLOND *enters hurriedly.*

BLOND.

[*Holding up his hand for silence.*] Hush ! Hush !

LUKYN.

What's the matter ?

BLOND.

The police !

ALL.

[*In a whisper.*] The police !

BLOND.

[*Quietly.*] The police are downstairs at the door I told you so.

CHARLOTTE.

[*Clinging to* VALE.] Oh, dear ! Oh, dear !

AGATHA POSKET.

Gracious powers !

BLOND.

Keep quiet, please. They may be satisfied with Madame Blond's assurances. I must put you in darkness ; they can see the light here if they go round to the back.

[*Blows out candles, and turns down the other lights.*

AGATHA POSKET AND CHARLOTTE.

Oh !

BLOND.

Keep quiet, please! My licence is once marked already. Colonel Lukyn, thank you for this.

[*He goes out.*

AGATHA POSKET.

[*Whimpering.*] Miserable men! What have you done? Are you criminals?

CHARLOTTE.

You haven't deserted or anything on my account, have you, Horace?

LUKYN.

Hush! Don't be alarmed. Our time has passed so agreeably that we have overstepped the prescribed hour for closing the hotel. That's all.

AGATHA POSKET.

What can they do to us?

LUKYN.

At the worst, take our names and addresses, and summon us for being here during prohibited hours.

AGATHA POSKET.

Oh!

CHARLOTTE.

[*To* VALE.] Horace, can't you speak?

VALE.

By Jove, I very much regret this.

ISIDORE *enters.*

LUKYN.

Well, well?

ISIDORE.

I beg your pardon, the police have come in.

LUKYN.

The devil! [*To* AGATHA POSKET.] My dear lady, don't faint at such a moment.

BLOND *enters quickly, carrying a rug.*

BLOND.

They are going over the house! Hide!

AGATHA POSKET AND CHARLOTTE.

Oh! [*There is a general commotion.*

BLOND.

They have put a man at the back. Keep away from the window. [*They are all bustling, and everybody is talking in whispers*; LUKYN *places* AGATHA POSKET *under the table, where she is concealed by the cover; he gets behind the overcoats hanging from the pegs;* VALE *and* CHARLOTTE *crouch down behind sofa.*] Thank you very much. I am going to put Isidore to bed on the sofa. That will explain the light which has just gone out. [ISIDORE *quietly places himself upon the sofa;* BLOND *covering him with the rug.*] Thank you very much. [*He goes out.*

AGATHA POSKET.

[*In a stifled voice.*] Charley ! Charley !

CHARLOTTE.

Yes.

AGATHA POSKET.

Where are you ?

CHARLOTTE.

Here.

AGATHA POSKET.

Oh, where is Captain Vale ?

CHARLOTTE.

I think he's near me.

VALE.

By Jove, Charlotte, I am !

AGATHA POSKET.

Colonel Lukyn !

LUKYN.

[*From behind the coats.*] Here, madam !

AGATHA POSKET.

Don't leave us.

LUKYN.

Madam, I am a soldier.

CHARLOTTE.

[*To* VALE.] Oh, Horace, at such a moment what a comfort we must be to each other.

VALE.

My dear Charlotte, it's incalculable.

[ISIDORE *gently raises himself and looks over the back of sofa.*

CHARLOTTE.

[*In terror.*] What's that?

ISIDORE.

[*Softly.*] I beg your pardon.

BLOND *enters quietly, followed by* CIS *and* MR. POSKET *on tip-toe,* MR. POSKET *holding on to* CIS.

BLOND.

This way; be quick. Excuse me, the police are just entering the room in which these gentlemen were having supper. One of them is anxious not to be asked any questions. Please to hide him and his friend somewhere. They are both very nice gentlemen.

[*He goes out, leaving* CIS *and* MR. POSKET.

MR. POSKET.

Cis, Cis. Advise me, my boy, advise me.

CIS.

It's all right, Guv, it's all right. Get behind something.

[AGATHA POSKET *peeps from under the table-cloth.*

AGATHA POSKET.

Æneas, and my child!

[MR. POSKET *and* CIS *wander about, looking for hiding-places.*

VALE.

[*To* CIS.] Go away.

CIS.

Oh!

LUKYN.

[*To* MR. POSKET, *who is fumbling at the coats.*] No, no.

BLOND.

[*Popping his head in.*] The police—coming.

[CIS *disappears behind the window-curtain.*
MR. POSKET *dives under the table.*

AGATHA POSKET.

Oh!

MR. POSKET.

[*To* AGATHA POSKET *in a whisper.*] I beg your pardon. I think I am addressing a lady. I am entirely the victim of circumstances. Accept my apologies for this apparent intrusion. [*No answer.*] Madam, I applaud your reticence, though any statement made under the present circumstances would not be used against you. Where is that boy? Oh! Madam, it may be acute nervousness on your part, but you are certainly pinching my arm.

[*There is the sound of heavy feet outside, then* MESSITER, *a gruff matter-of-fact Inspector of Police, enters, followed by* HARRIS, *a constable, and* ACHILLE BLOND.

BLOND.

You need not trouble yourself—take my word for it.

BAVERISCHE STAATS- BIBLIOTHEK MUENCHEN

MESSITER.

No trouble, Mr. Blond, thank you. [*Sniffing.*] Candles—blown out—lately. This is where the light was.

BLOND.

Perhaps. My servant, Isidore, sleeps here; he has only just gone to bed.

MESSITER.

Oh! [*Taking a bull's-eye lantern from* HARRIS *and throwing the light on* ISIDORE, *who is apparently sleeping soundly.*] Dead tired, I suppose?

BLOND.

I suppose so.

MESSITER.

[*Slightly turning down the covering.*] He sleeps in his clothes?

BLOND.

Oh yes.

MESSITER.

Always?

BLOND.

Always—it is a rule of the hotel.

MESSITER.

Oh!—why's that?

BLOND.

To be ready for the morning.

MESSITER.

All right—all right. [*Throwing the rug and blanket aside.*] Isidore, go downstairs and give your full name and particulars to Sergeant Jarvis.

ISIDORE.

[*Rising instantly.*] Yes, sir—very good.

BLOND.

[*To* ISIDORE.] Why do you wake up so soon? Devil take you!

ISIDORE.

I beg your pardon. [*He goes out.*

MESSITER.

What is underneath that window, Mr. Blond?

BLOND.

The skylight over the kitchen—devil take it!

MESSITER.

Thank you—*you* can go down to the sergeant now, Mr. Blond.

BLOND.

With pleasure—devil take me! [*He goes out.*

MESSITER.

Now then, Harris.

HARRIS.

Yes, sir.

MESSITER.

Keep perfectly still and hold your breath as long as you can.

HARRIS.

Hold my breath, sir ?

MESSITER.

Yes—I want to hear how many people are breathing in this room. Are you ready ?

HARRIS.

Yes, sir.

MESSITER.

Go ! [HARRIS *stands still, tightly compressing his lips ;* MESSITER *quickly examines his face by the light of the lantern, then walks round the room, listening, and nodding his head with satisfaction as he passes the various hiding-places.* HARRIS *writhes in agony ; in the end he gives it up and breathes heavily.*] Harris !

HARRIS.

[*Exhausted.*] Yes, sir !

MESSITER.

You're breathing

HARRIS.

Oh lor', yes, sir !

MESSITER.

You'll report yourself to-night !

HARRIS.

I held on till I nearly went off, sir.

MESSITER.

[*Giving him the bull's-eye.*] Don't argue, but light up. There are half a dozen people concealed in this room. [*There is a cry from the women.* CHARLOTTE *and* VALE *rise;* LUKYN *steps from behind the coats.*] I thought so. [*As* MESSITER *turns,* AGATHA POSKET *and* MR. POSKET *rise,* CIS *comes quickly, catches hold of* MR. POSKET, *and drags him across to the window.*]

CIS.

[*To* MR. POSKET.] Come on, Guv. Come on!

[*They disappear through the curtain as* HARRIS *turns up the lights. Then there is a cry and the sound of a crash.*

AGATHA POSKET.

They're killed!

[MESSITER *looks through the window.*

MESSITER.

No, they're not; they've gone into the kitchen and the balcony with them. Look sharp, Harris.

[HARRIS *goes out quickly.*

LUKYN.

[*To* MESSITER.] I shall report you for this, sir.

MESSITER.

[*Taking out his note-book.*] Very sorry, sir; it's my duty.

LUKYN.

Duty, sir! Coming your confounded detective tricks on ladies and gentlemen! How dare you make ladies and gentlemen suspend their breathing till they nearly have apoplexy? Do you know I'm a short-necked man, sir?

MESSITER.

I didn't want you to leave off breathing, sir. I wanted you to breathe louder. Your name and address, sir.

LUKYN.

Gur-r-r-h!

MESSITER.

Army gentleman, sir?

LUKYN.

How do you know that?

MESSITER.

Short style of speaking, sir. Army gentlemen run a bit brusquish when on in years.

LUKYN.

Oh! Alexander Lukyn—Colonel—Her Majesty's Cheshire Light Infantry, late 41st Foot, 3rd Battalion—Bengal—Retired.

MESSITER.

[*Writing.*] Hotel or club, Colonel?

LUKYN.

Neither. 19A, Cork Street—lodgings.

MESSITER.

[*Writing.*] Very nice part, Colonel. Thank you.

LUKYN.

Bah!

MESSITER.

Other gentleman?

VALE.

[*With languid hauteur.*] Horace Edmund Cholmeley Clive Napier Vale Captain—Shropshire Fusiliers—Stark's Hotel, Conduit Street.

MESSITER.

[*Writing.*] Retired, sir?

VALE.

No, confound you—active!

MESSITER.

Thank you, Captain. Ahem! Beg pardon. The —the ladies.

[CHARLOTTE *clings to* VALE, AGATHA POSKET *to* LUKYN.

CHARLOTTE AND AGATHA POSKET.

No—no! No—no!

LUKYN.

[*To* AGATHA POSKET.] All right—all right—trust to me! [*To* MESSITER.] Well, sir?

MESSITER.

Names and addresses, please.

LUKYN.

Officer—my good fellow—tell me now—er—um—at the present moment, what are you most in want of?

MESSITER.

These two ladies' names and addresses, please. Be quick, Colonel. [*Pointing to* AGATHA POSKET.] That lady first.

LUKYN.

Christian names—er—ah—er—Alice Emmeline.

MESSITER.

[*Writing.*] Alice Emmeline. Surname?

LUKYN.

Er—um—Fitzgerald—101, Wilton Street, Piccadilly.

MESSITER.

Single lady?

LUKYN.

Quite.

MESSITER.

Very good, sir.

AGATHA POSKET.

[*To* LUKYN, *tearfully.*] Oh, thank you, such a nice address too.

MESSITER.

[*To* VALE.] Now, Captain, please—that lady.

VALE.

[*Who has been re-assuring* CHARLOTTE.] Haw! ha! this lady is—ah—um—the other lady's sister.

MESSITER.

Single lady, sir?

VALE.

Certainly.

MESSITER.

[*Writing.*] Christian name, Captain?

VALE.

Ah—um—Harriett.

MESSITER.

[*Writing.*] Surname.

VALE.

Er—Macnamara.

MESSITER.

[*With a grim smile.*] Quite so. Lives with her sister, of course, sir?

VALE.

Of course.

MESSITER.

Where at, sir?

VALE.

Albert Mansions, Victoria Street.

CHARLOTTE.

[*To* VALE.] Oh, thank you, I always fancied that spot.

MESSITER.

Very much obliged, gentlemen.

LUKYN.

[*Who has listened to* VALE'S *answers in helpless horror.*] By George, well out of it!

[CHARLOTTE *totters across to* AGATHA POSKET, *who embraces her.*

LUKYN.

[*Taking down the overcoats and throwing one to* VALE.] Vale, your coat.

HARRIS *enters.*

HARRIS.

[*To* MESSITER.] Very sorry, sir; the two other gentlemen got clean off, through the back scullery door —old hands, to all appearance.

[MESSITER *stamps his foot, with an exclamation.*

AGATHA POSKET.

[*To herself.*] My boy—saved!

LUKYN.

[*To* HARRIS, *who stands before the door.*] Constable, get out of the way.

MESSITER.

[*Sharply.*] Harris!

HARRIS.

[*Without moving.*] Yes, sir.

MESSITER.

You will leave the hotel with these ladies, and not lose sight of them till you've ascertained what their names *are*, and where they *do* live.

LUKYN AND VALE.

What!

AGATHA POSKET AND CHARLOTTE.

Oh!

MESSITER.

Your own fault, gentlemen; it's my duty.

LUKYN.

And it is *my* duty to save these helpless women from the protecting laws of my confounded country! Vale!

VALE.

[*Putting his coat on the sofa.*] Active!

LUKYN.

[*To* HARRIS.] Let these ladies pass! [*He takes* HARRIS *by the collar and flings him over to* VALE, *who throws him over towards the ladies, who push him away.* MESSITER *puts a whistle to his mouth and blows; there is an immediate answer from without.*] More of your fellows outside?

MESSITER.

Yes, sir, at your service. Very sorry, gentlemen, but you and your party are in my custody.

LUKYN AND VALE.

What?

AGATHA POSKET AND CHARLOTTE.

Oh!

MESSITER.

For assaulting this man in the execution of his duty.

LUKYN.

You'll dare to lock us up all night?

MESSITER.

It's one o'clock now, Colonel—you'll come on first thing in the morning.

LUKYN.

Come on? At what Court?

MESSITER.

Mulberry Street.

AGATHA POSKET.

Ah! The magistrate?

MESSITER.

Mr. Posket, mum.

[AGATHA POSKET *sinks into a chair*, CHARLOTTE *at her feet*; LUKYN, *overcome, falls on* VALE'S *shoulders.*

END OF THE SECOND ACT.

THE THIRD ACT

The first scene is the Magistrate's room at Mulberry Street Police Court, with a doorway covered by curtains, leading directly into the Court, and a door opening into a passage. It is the morning after the events of the last Act.

POLICE SERGEANT LUGG, *a middle-aged man with a slight country dialect, enters with "The Times" newspaper, and proceeds to cut it and glance at its contents, while he hums a song.*

MR. WORMINGTON, *an elderly, trim and precise man, enters.*

MR. WORMINGTON.

Good morning, Lugg.

LUGG.

Morning, Mr. Wormington.

MR. WORMINGTON.

Mr. Posket not arrived yet?

LUGG.

Not yet, sir. Hullo! [*Reading.*] "Raid on a West End Hotel.—At an early hour this morning——"

MR. WORMINGTON.

Yes, I've read that—a case of assault upon the police.

LUGG.

Why, these must be the folks who've been so precious rampageous all night.

MR. WORMINGTON.

Very likely.

LUGG.

Yes, sir, protestin' and protestin' till they protested everybody's sleep away. Nice-looking women, too, though, as I tell Mrs. Lugg, now-a-days there's no telling who's the lady and who isn't. Who's got this job, sir?

MR. WORMINGTON.

Inspector Messiter.

LUGG.

Messiter! That's luck! Why he's the worst elocutionist in the force, sir.* [*As he arranges the newspaper upon the table, he catches sight of* MR. WORMINGTON'S *necktie, which is bright red.*] Well, I—excuse me, Mr. Wormington, but all the years I've had the honour of knowin' you, sir, I've never seen you wear a necktie with, so to speak, a dash of colour in it.

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* A City magistrate, censuring a constable for the indistinctness of his utterances in the witness box, suggested that the police should be instructed in a method of delivering evidence articulately.

MR. WORMINGTON.

Well, Lugg, no, that's true, but to-day is an exceptional occasion with me. It is, in fact, the twenty-fifth anniversary of my marriage, and I thought it due to Mrs. Wormington to vary, in some slight degree, the sombreness of my attire. I confess I am a little uneasy in case Mr. Posket should consider it at all disrespectful to the Court.

LUGG.

Not he, sir.

MR. WORMINGTON.

I don't know. Mr. Posket is punctiliousness itself in dress, and his cravat's invariably black. However, it is not every man who has a silver wedding-day.

LUGG.

It's not every one as wants one, sir.

[MR. WORMINGTON *goes out; at the same moment* MR. POSKET *enters quickly, and leans on his chair as if exhausted. His appearance is extremely wretched; he is still in evening dress, but his clothes are muddy, and his linen soiled and crumpled, while across the bridge of his nose he has a small strip of black plaster.*

MR. POSKET.

[*Faintly.*] Good morning, Lugg.

LUGG.

Good morning to you, sir. Regretting the liberty I'm taking, sir—I've seen you look more strong and hearty.

MR. POSKET.

I am fairly well, thank you, Lugg. My night was rather—rather disturbed. Lugg!

LUGG.

Sir?

MR. POSKET.

Have any inquiries been made about me, this morning—any messenger from Mrs. Posket, for instance, to ask how I am?

LUGG.

No, sir.

MR. POSKET.

Oh! my child, my stepson, young Mr. Farringdon, has not called, has he?

LUGG.

No, sir.

MR. POSKET.

[*To himself.*] Where can that boy be? [*To* LUGG.] Thank you, that's all.

LUGG.

[*Who has been eyeing* MR. POSKET *with astonishment, goes to the door, and then touches the bridge of his nose.*] Nasty cut while shavin', sir? [LUGG *goes out.*

MR. POSKET.

Where can that boy have got to? If I could only remember how, when, and where we parted! I think it was at Kilburn. Let me think—first, the kitchen. [*Putting his hand to his side as if severely bruised.*] Oh! Cis was all right, because I fell underneath; I felt

it was my duty to do so. Then what occurred? A dark room, redolent of onions and cabbages and paraffine oil, and Cis dragging me over the stone floor, saying, "We're in the scullery, Guv; let's try and find the tradesmen's door." Next, the night air—oh, how refreshing! "Cis, my boy, we will both learn a lesson from to-night—never deceive." Where are we? In Argyll Street. "Look out, Guv, they're after us." Then—then, as Cis remarked when we were getting over the railings of Portman Square—then the fun began. We over into the square—they after us. Over again, into Baker Street. Down Baker Street. Curious recollections, whilst running, of my first visit, as a happy child, to Madame Tussaud's, and wondering whether her removal had affected my fortunes. "Come on, Guv—you're getting blown." Where are we? Park Road. What am I doing? Getting up out of puddle. St. John's Wood. The cricket-ground. "I say, Guv, what a run this would be at Lord's, wouldn't it? and no fear of being run out either, more fear of being run in." "What road is this, Cis?" Maida Vale. Good gracious! A pious aunt of mine once lived in Hamilton Terrace; she never thought I should come to this. "Guv?" "Yes, my boy." "Let's get this kind-hearted coffee-stall keeper to hide us." We apply. "Will you assist two unfortunate gentlemen?" "No, blowed if I will." "Why not?" "Cos I'm agoin' to join in the chase after you." Ah! Off again, along Maida Vale! On, on, heaven knows how or where, 'till at last, no sound of pursuit, no Cis, no breath, and the early Kilburn buses starting to town. Then I came back again, and not much too soon for the Court. [*Going up to the washstand and looking into the little mirror, with a*

low groan.] Oh, how shockingly awful I look, and how stiff and sore I feel! [*Taking off his coat and hanging it on a peg, then washing his hands.*] What a weak and double-faced creature to be a magistrate! I really ought to get some member of Parliament to ask a question about me in the House. Where's the soap? I shall put five pounds and costs into the poor's box to-morrow. But I deserve a most severe caution. Ah, perhaps I shall get that from Agatha. [*He takes off his white tie, rolls it up and crams it into his pocket.*] When Wormington arrives I will borrow some money and send out for a black cravat! All my pocket money is in my overcoat at the Hotel des Princes. If the police seize it there is some consolation in knowing that that money will never be returned to me. [*There is a knock at the door.*] Come in!

LUGG *enters.*

LUGG.

Your servant, Mr. Wyke, wants to see you, sir.

MR. POSKET.

Bring him in. [LUGG *goes out.* Wyke! From Agatha! From Agatha!

LUGG *re-enters with* WYKE.

WYKE.

Ahem! Good morning, sir.

MR. POSKET.

Good morning, Wyke. Ahem! Is Master Farringdon quite well?

WYKE.

He hadn't arrived home, when I left, sir.

MR. POSKET.

Oh! Where is that boy? [*To* WYKE.] How's your mistress this morning, Wyke?

WYKE.

Very well, I hope, sir; *she* ain't come home yet, either.

MR. POSKET.

Not returned—nor Miss Verrinder?

WYKE.

No, sir—neither of them.

MR. POSKET.

[*To himself.*] Lady Jenkins is worse, they are still nursing her! Good women, true women!

WYKE.

[*To himself.*] That's eased his deceivin' old mind.

MR. POSKET.

[*To himself.*] Now, if the servants don't betray me and Cis returns safely, the worst is over. To what a depth I have fallen when I rejoice at Lady Jenkins' indisposition!

WYKE.

Cook thought you ought to know that the mistress hadn't come home, sir.

MR. POSKET.

Certainly. Take a cab at once to Campden Hill and bring me back word how poor Lady Jenkins is. Tell Mrs. Posket I will come on the moment the Court rises.

WYKE.

Yes, sir.

MR. POSKET.

And, Wyke. It is not at all necessary that Mrs. Posket should know of my absence with Master Farringdon from home last night. Mrs. Posket's present anxieties are more than sufficient. Inform Cook, and Popham, and the other servants that I shall recognise their discretion in the same spirit I have already displayed towards you.

WYKE.

[*With sarcasm.*] Thank you, sir. I will. [*He produces from his waistcoat-pocket a small packet of money done up in newspaper, which he throws down upon the table.*] Meanwhile, sir, I thought you would like to count up the little present of money you gave me last night, and in case you thought you'd been over-liberal, sir, you might halve the amount. It isn't no good spoiling of us all, sir.

LUGG *enters.*

MR. POSKET.

You are an excellent servant, Wyke; I am very pleased. I will see you when you return from Lady Jenkins's. Be quick.

WYKE.

Yes, sir. [*To himself.*] He won't give me twopence again in a hurry.

[*He goes out;* LUGG *is about to follow.*

MR. POSKET.

Oh, Lugg, I want you to go to the nearest hosier's and purchase me a neat cravat.

LUGG.

[*Looking inquisitively at* MR. POSKET.] A necktie, sir?

MR. POSKET.

Yes. [*Turning up his coat collar to shield himself from* LUGG'S *gaze.*] A necktie—a necktie.

LUGG.

What sort of a kind of one, sir?

MR. POSKET.

Oh, one like Mr. Wormington's.

LUGG.

One like he's wearing this morning, sir?

MR. POSKET.

Of course, of course, of course.

LUGG.

[*To himself.*] Fancy him being jealous of Mr. Wormington, now. Very good, sir—what price, sir?

MR. POSKET.

The best. [*To himself.*] There now, I've no money. [*Seeing the packet on table.*] Oh, pay for it with this, Lugg.

LUGG.

Yes, sir.

MR. POSKET.

And keep the change for your trouble.

LUGG.

Thank you, sir; thank you, sir—very much obliged to you, sir. [*To himself.*] That's like a liberal gentleman.

[LUGG *goes out as* MR. WORMINGTON *enters through the curtains with the charge sheet in his hand.* MR. WORMINGTON, *on seeing* MR. POSKET, *uneasily tucks his pocket-handkerchief in his collar so as to hide his necktie.*

MR. WORMINGTON.

H'm! Good morning.

MR. POSKET.

Good morning, Wormington.

MR. WORMINGTON.

The charge sheet.

MR. POSKET.

Sit down.

[MR. WORMINGTON *puts on his spectacles;* MR. POSKET *also attempts to put on his spectacles, but hurts the bridge of his nose, winces, and desists.*

MR. POSKET.

[*To himself.*] My nose is extremely painful. [*To* MR. WORMINGTON.] You have a bad cold I am afraid, Wormington—bronchial?

MR. WORMINGTON.

Ahem! Well—ah—the fact is—you may have noticed how very chilly the nights are.

MR. POSKET.

Very, very.

MR. WORMINGTON.

The only way to maintain the circulation is to run as fast as one can.

MR. POSKET.

To run—as fast as one can—yes—quite so.

MR. WORMINGTON.

[*To himself, looking at* MR. POSKET'S *shirt front.*] How very extraordinary—he is wearing no cravat whatever!

MR. POSKET.

[*Buttoning up his coat to avoid* MR. WORMINGTON'S *gaze.*] Anything important this morning?

MR. WORMINGTON.

Nothing particular after the first charge, a serious business arising out of the raid on the "Hotel des Princes."

MR. POSKET.

[*Starting.*] "Hotel des Princes?"

MR. WORMINGTON.

Inspector Messiter found six persons supping there at one o'clock this morning. Two contrived to escape.

MR. POSKET.

Dear me—I am surprised—I mean, did they?

MR. WORMINGTON.

But they left their overcoats behind them, and it is believed they will be traced.

MR. POSKET.

Oh, do you—do you think it is worth while? The police have a great deal to occupy them just now.

MR. WORMINGTON.

But surely if the police see their way to capture anybody we had better raise no obstacle.

MR. POSKET.

No—no—quite so—never struck me.

MR. WORMINGTON.

[*Referring to charge sheet.*] The remaining four it was found necessary to take into custody.

MR. POSKET.

Good gracious! What a good job the other two didn't wait. I beg your pardon—I mean—you say we have four?

MR. WORMINGTON.

Yes, on the charge of obstructing the police. The first assault occurred in the supper-room—the second in the four-wheeled cab on the way to the station. There were five persons in the cab at the time—the two women, the two men, and the Inspector.

MR. POSKET.

Dear me, it must have been a very complicated assault. Who are the unfortunate people?

MR. WORMINGTON.

The men are of some position. [*Reading.*] "Alexander Lukyn, Colonel"——

MR. POSKET.

Lukyn! I—I—know Colonel Lukyn; we are old schoolfellows.

MR. WORMINGTON.

Very sad! [*Reading.*] The other is "Horace, &c. &c. Vale—Captain—Shropshire Fusiliers."

MR. POSKET.

And the ladies?

Mr. WORMINGTON.

Call themselves, "Alice Emmeline Fitzgerald and Harriet Macnamara."

MR. POSKET.

[*To himself.*] Which is the lady who was under the table with me?

MR. WORMINGTON.

They are not recognised by the police at present, but they furnish incorrect addresses, and their demeanour is generally violent and unsatisfactory.

MR. POSKET.

[*To himself.*] Who pinched me—Alice or Harriet?

Mr. WORMINGTON.

I mention this case because it seems to be one calling for most stringent measures.

MR. POSKET.

Wouldn't a fine, and a severe warning from the Bench, to the two persons who have got away——

MR. WORMINGTON.

I think not. Consider, Mr. Posket, not only defying the licensing laws, but obstructing the police!

MR. POSKET.

That's true—it is hard, when the police are doing anything, that they should be obstructed.

LUGG *enters.*

LUGG.

[*Attempting to conceal some annoyance.*] Your necktie, sir.

MR. POSKET.

S-ssh!

MR. WORMINGTON.

[*To himself.*] Then he *came* without one—dear me!

LUGG.

[*Clapping down a paper parcel on the table.*] As near like Mr. Wormington's as possible—brighter if anything.

MR. POSKET.

[*Opening the parcel, and finding a very common, gaudy neckkerchief.*] Good gracious! What a horrible affair!

LUGG.

According to my information, sir—like Mr. Wormington's.

MR. POSKET.

Mr. Wormington would never be seen in such an abominable colour.

MR. WORMINGTON.

Well—really—I—[*Removing the handkerchief from his throat.*] I am extremely sorry.

MR. POSKET.

My dear Wormington !

MR. WORMINGTON.

I happen to be wearing something similar—the first time for five-and-twenty years.

MR. POSKET.

Oh, I beg your pardon. [*To himself.*] Everything seems against me.

LUGG.

One-and-nine it come to, sir. [*Producing the paper packet of money and laying it upon the table.*] And I brought back all the money you gave me, thinking you'd like to look over it quietly. Really, sir, I never showed up smaller in any shop in all my life!

MR. POSKET.

Upon my word. First one and then another ! What *is* wrong with the money. [*Opens the packet.*] Twopence ! [*To himself.*] That man Wyke will tell all to Agatha ! Oh, everything is against me.

[LUGG *has opened the door, taken a card from some one outside, and handed it to* MR. WORMINGTON.

MR. WORMINGTON.

From cell No. 3. [*Handing the card to* MR. POSKET.

MR. POSKET.

[*Reading.*] "Dear Posket, for the love of goodness see me before the sitting of the Court. Alexander Lukyn." Poor dear Lukyn! What on earth shall I do?

MR. WORMINGTON.

Such a course would be most unusual.

MR. POSKET.

Everything is unusual. Your cravat is unusual. This prisoner is invited to dine at my house to-day—that's peculiar. He is my wife's first husband's only child's god-father—that's a little out of the ordinary.

MR. WORMINGTON.

The charge is so serious!

MR. POSKET.

But I am a man as well as a magistrate, advise me, Wormington, advise me!

MR. WORMINGTON.

Well—you can apply to yourself for permission to grant Colonel Lukyn's request.

MR. POSKET.

[*Hastily scribbling on* LUKYN'S *card.*] I do—I do—and after much conflicting argument I consent to see Colonel Lukyn here, immediately. [*Handing the card to* MR. WORMINGTON *who passes it to* LUGG, *who then*

goes out.] Don't leave me, Wormington—you must stand by me to see that I remain calm, firm, and judicial. [*He hastily puts on the red necktie in an untidy manner.*] Poor Lukyn, I must sink the friend in the magistrate, and in dealing with his errors apply the scourge to myself. [*To* MR. WORMINGTON.] Wormington, tap me on the shoulder when I am inclined to be more than usually unusual.

[MR. WORMINGTON *stands behind him, and* LUGG *enters with* LUKYN. LUKYN'S *dress-clothes are much soiled and disordered, and he, too, has a small strip of plaster upon the bridge of his nose. There is a constrained pause,* LUKYN *and* MR. POSKET *both cough.*

LUKYN.

[*To himself.*] Poor Posket!

MR. POSKET.

[*To himself.*] Poor Lukyn!

LUKYN.

[*To himself.*] I suppose he has been sitting up for his wife all night, poor devil! [*To* MR. POSKET.] Ahem! How are you, Posket?

[MR. WORMINGTON *touches* MR. POSKET'S *shoulder.*

MR. POSKET.

I regret to see you in this terrible position, Colonel Lukyn.

LUKYN.

By George, old fellow, I regret to find myself in it. [*Sitting, and taking up newspaper.*] I suppose they've got us in the "Times," confound 'em!

[*While* LUKYN *is reading the paper*, MR. POSKET *and* MR. WORMINGTON *hold a hurried consultation respecting* LUKYN'S *behaviour.*

MR. POSKET.

H'm! [*To* LUGG.] Sergeant, I think Colonel Lukyn may be accommodated with a chair.

LUGG.

He's in it sir.

LUKYN.

[*Rising and putting down paper.*] Beg your pardon, forgot where I was. I suppose everything must be formal in this confounded place?

MR. POSKET.

I am afraid, Colonel Lukyn, it will be necessary even here to preserve strictly our unfortunate relative positions. [LUKYN *bows.*] Sit down. [LUKYN *sits again.*] [POSKET *takes up the charge sheet.*] Colonel Lukyn! In addressing you now, I am speaking, not as a man, but, as an instrument of the law. As a man I may, or may not, be a weak, vicious, despicable creature.

LUKYN.

Certainly—of course.

MR. POSKET.

But, as a magistrate I am bound to say you fill me with pain and astonishment.

LUKYN.

Quite right—every man to his trade, go on, Posket.

MR. POSKET.

[*Turning his chair to face* LUKYN.] Alexander Lukyn — when I look at you — when I look at you —— [*He attempts to put on his spectacles.*] Ah—my nose. [*To* LUKYN.] I say, when I look at you, Alexander Lukyn, I confront a most mournful spectacle. A military officer, trained in the ways of discipline and smartness, now, in consequence of his own misdoings, lamentably bruised and battered, shamefully disfigured by plaster, with his apparel soiled and damaged—all terrible evidence of a conflict with that power of which I am the representative.

LUKYN.

[*Turning his chair to face* MR. POSKET.] Well, Posket, if it comes to that, when I look at you, when I look at you—[*He attempts to fix his glass in his eye.*] Confound my nose ! [*To* MR. POSKET.] When I look at you, *you* are not a very imposing object, this morning.

MR. POSKET.

Lukyn !

LUKYN.

You look quite as shaky as I do—and you're not quite innocent of court plaster.

MR. POSKET.

Lukyn ! Really !

LUKYN.

And as for our attire, we neither of us look as if we had slipped out of a bandbox.

MR. POSKET.

Don't, Lukyn, don't! Pray respect my legal status! [MR. WORMINGTON *leads* MR. POSKET, *who has risen, back to his seat.*] Thank you, Wormington. Alexander Lukyn, I have spoken. It remains for you to state your motive in seeking this painful interview.

LUKYN.

Certainly! H'm! You know, of course, that I am not alone in this affair?

MR. POSKET.

[*Referring to charge sheet.*] Three persons appear to be charged with you.

LUKYN.

Yes. Two others got away. Cowards! If ever I find them, I'll destroy them!

MR. POSKET.

Lukyn!

LUKYN.

I will! Another job for you, Posket.

MR. POSKET.

[*With dignity.*] I beg your pardon, in the event of such a deplorable occurrence, I should not occupy my present position. Go on, sir.

LUKYN.

Horace Vale and I are prepared to stand the brunt of our misdeeds. But, Posket, there are ladies in the case.

MR. POSKET.

In the annals of the Mulberry Street Police Court such a circumstance is not unprecedented.

LUKYN.

Two helpless, forlorn ladies.

MR. POSKET.

[*Referring to charge sheet.*] Alice Emmeline Fitzgerald and Harriet Macnamara. Oh, Lukyn, Lukyn!

LUKYN.

Pooh! I ask no favour for myself or Vale, but I come to you, Posket, to beg you to use your power to release these two ladies without a moment's delay.

[MR. WORMINGTON *touches* MR. POSKET'S *shoulder.*

MR. POSKET.

Upon my word, Lukyn! Do you think I am to be undermined?

LUKYN.

Undermine the devil, sir! Don't talk to me! Let these ladies go, I say! Don't bring them into Court, don't see their faces—don't hear their voices—if you do, you'll regret it!

MR. POSKET.

Colonel Lukyn!

LUKYN.

[*Leaning across the table and gripping* MR. POSKET *by the shoulder.*] Posket, do you know that one of these ladies is a married lady?

MR. POSKET.

Of course I don't, sir. I blush to hear it.

LUKYN.

And do you know that from the moment this married lady steps into your confounded Court, the happiness, the contentment of a doting husband, become a confounded wreck and ruin ?

MR. POSKET.

Then, sir, let it be my harrowing task to open the eyes of this foolish doting man to the treachery, the perfidy, which nestles upon his very hearthrug !

LUKYN.

Oh, lor' ! Be careful, Posket ! By George, be careful !

MR. POSKET.

Alexander Lukyn, you are my friend. Amongst the personal property taken from you when you entered these precincts may have been found a memorandum of an engagement to dine at my house to-night at a quarter to eight o'clock. But, Lukyn, I solemnly prepare you, you stand in danger of being late for dinner ! I go further—I am not sure, after this morning's proceedings, that Mrs. Posket will be ready to receive you.

LUKYN.

I'm confoundedly certain she *won't !*

MR. POSKET.

Therefore, Lukyn, as an English husband and father it will be my duty to teach you and your

disreputable companions [*referring to charge-sheet*], Alice Emmeline Fitzgerald and Harriet Macnamara, some rudimentary notions of propriety and decorum.

LUKYN.

Confound you, Posket—listen!

MR. POSKET.

I am listening, sir, to the guiding voice of Mrs. Posket—that newly-made wife still blushing from the embarrassment of her second marriage, and that voice says, "Strike for the sanctity of hearth and home, for the credit of the wives of England—no mercy!"

MR. WORMINGTON.

It is time to go into Court, sir. The charge against Colonel Lukyn is first on the list.

LUKYN.

Posket, I'll give you one last chance! If I write upon a scrap of paper the real names of these two unfortunate ladies, will you shut yourself up for a moment, away from observation, and read these names before you go into Court?

MR. POSKET.

Certainly not, Colonel Lukyn! I cannot be influenced by private information in dealing with an offence which is, in my opinion, as black as—as my cravat! Ahem!

[MR. WORMINGTON *and* MR. POSKET *look at each other's necktie and turn up their collars hastily.*

LUKYN.

[*To himself.*] There's no help for it. [*To* MR. POSKET.] Then Posket, you must have the plain truth where you stand, by George! The two ladies who are my companions in this affair are——

MR. POSKET.

Sergeant! Colonel Lukyn will now join his party.

[LUGG *steps up to* LUKYN *sharply.*

LUKYN.

[*Boiling with indignation.*] What, sir? What?

MR. POSKET.

Lukyn, I think we both have engagements—will you excuse me?

LUKYN.

Posket! You've gone too far! If you went down on your knees, which you appear to have been recently doing, and begged the names of these two ladies, you shouldn't have 'em! No sir, by George, you shouldn't.

MR. POSKET.

Good morning, Colonel Lukyn.

LUKYN.

You've lectured me, pooh-poohed me, snubbed me—a soldier, sir—a soldier! But when I think of your dinner-party to-night, with my empty chair, like Banquo, by George, sir—and the chief dish composed of a well-browned, well-basted, family skeleton, served up under the best silver cover, I pity you, Posket! Good morning! [*He marches out with* LUGG.

MR. POSKET.

Ah! Thank goodness that ordeal is passed. Now, Wormington, I think I am ready to face the duties of the day! Shall we go into Court?

MR. WORMINGTON.

Certainly, sir.

[MR. WORMINGTON *gathers up papers from the table.* MR. POSKET *with a shaking hand pours out water from carafe and drinks.*

MR. POSKET.

My breakfast. [*To* MR. WORMINGTON.] I hope I defended the sanctity of the Englishman's hearth, Wormington?

MR. WORMINGTON.

You did, indeed. As a married man, I thank you.

MR. POSKET.

Give me your arm, Wormington! I am not very well this morning, and this interview with Colonel Lukyn has shaken me. I think your coat-collar is turned up, Wormington.

MR. WORMINGTON.

So is yours, I fancy, sir.

MR. POSKET.

Ahem!

[*They turn their collars down*, MR. POSKET *takes* MR. WORMINGTON'S *arm. They are going towards the curtains when* WYKE *enters hurriedly at the door.*

WYKE.

Excuse me, sir.

MR. WORMINGTON.

Hush! hush! Mr. Posket is just going into Court.

WYKE.

Lady Jenkins has sent me back to tell you that she hasn't seen the missis for the last week or more.

MR. POSKET.

Mrs. Posket went to Campden Hill with Miss Verrinder last night!

WYKE.

They haven't arrived there, sir.

MR. POSKET.

Haven't arrived!

WYKE.

No sir—and even a slow four-wheeler won't account for that.

MR. POSKET.

Wormington! there's something wrong! Mrs. Posket quitted a fairly happy home last night and has not been seen or heard of since!

MR. WORMINGTON.

Pray don't be anxious, sir, the Court is waiting.

MR. POSKET.

But I am anxious! Tell Sergeant Lugg to look over the Accident-Book, this morning's Hospital Returns, List of Missing Children, Suspicious Pledges, People left Chargeable to the Parish, Attend to your Window Fastenings——! I—I—Wormington, Mrs. Posket and I disagreed last night.

MR. WORMINGTON.

Don't think of it, sir! you should hear me and Mrs. Wormington! Pray do come into Court.

MR. POSKET.

Court! I'm totally unfit for business! totally unfit for business!

[MR. WORMINGTON *hurries him off through the curtains.* LUGG *enters, almost breathless.*

LUGG.

We've got charge one in the Dock—all four of 'em. [*Seeing* WYKE.] Hallo! you back again!

WYKE.

Yes—seems so. [*They stand facing each other, dabbing their foreheads with their handkerchiefs.*] Phew! you seem warm.

LUGG.

Phew! you don't seem so cool.

WYKE.

I've been lookin' after two ladies.

LUGG.

So have I.

WYKE.

I haven t found 'em.

LUGG.

If I'd known, I'd a been pleased to lend you our two.

[*From the other side of the curtains there is the sound of a shriek from* AGATHA POSKET *and* CHARLOTTE.

WYKE.

Lor'! what's that!

LUGG.

That *is* our two. Don't notice them—they're hystericals. They're mild now to what they have been. I say, old fellow—is your guv'nor all right in his head?

WYKE.

I suppose so—why?

LUGG.

I've a partickler reason for asking. Does he ever tell you to buy him anything and keep the change?

WYKE.

What d'yer mean?

LUGG.

Well, does he ever come down handsome for your extry exertion—do you ever get any tips?

WYKE.

Rather. What do you think he made me a present of last night?

LUGG.

Don't know.

WYKE.

Twopence—to buy a new umbrella.

LUGG.

Well, I'm blessed! And he gave me the same sum to get him a silk necktie. It's my opinion he's got a softening of the brain [*Another shriek from the two women, a cry from* MR. POSKET, *and then a hubbub are heard. Running up to the curtains and looking through.*] Hallo! what's wrong? Here! I told you so—he's broken out, he's broken out.

WYKE.

Who's broken out?

LUGG.

The lunatic. Keep back, I'm wanted. [*He goes through the curtains.*]

WYKE.

[*Looking after him.*] Look at the guv'nor waving his arms and going on anyhow at the prisoners! Prisoners! Gracious goodness—it's the missis!

[*Amid a confused sound of voices* MR. POSKET *is brought in, through the curtains, by* MR. WORMINGTON. LUGG *follows.*

MR. POSKET.

Wormington! Wormington! the two ladies! the two ladies! I know them!

MR. WORMINGTON.

It's all right, sir, it's all right—don't be upset, sir!

MR. POSKET.

I'm not well; what shall I do?

MR. WORMINGTON.

Nothing further, sir. What you have done is quite in form.

MR. POSKET.

What I *have* done?

MR. WORMINGTON.

Yes, sir—you did precisely what I suggested—took the words from me. They pleaded guilty.

MR. POSKET.

Guilty!

MR. WORMINGTON.

Yes, sir—and you sentenced them.

MR. POSKET.

Sentenced them! The ladies!

MR. WORMINGTON.

Yes, sir. You've given them seven days, without the option of a fine.

[MR. POSKET *collapses into* MR. WORMINGTON'S *arms*.

THE SECOND SCENE.

The scene changes to MR. POSKET'S *drawing-room, as in the first act.*

BEATIE *enters timidly, dressed in simple walking-costume.*

BEATIE.

How dreadfully early. Eleven o'clock, and I'm not supposed to come till four. I wonder why I want to instruct Cis all day. I'm not nearly so enthusiastic about the two little girls I teach in Russell Square.

POPHAM *enters. Her eyes are red as if from crying.*

POPHAM.

[*Drawing back on seeing* BEATIE.] That music person again. I beg your pardon—I ain't got no instructions to prepare no drawing-room for no lessons till four o'clock.

BEATIE.

I wish to see Mrs. Posket.

POPHAM.

She hasn't come home.

BEATIE.

Oh, then—er—um—Master Farringdon will do.

POPHAM.

[*In tears.*] He haven't come home either!

BEATIE.

Oh, where is he?

POPHAM.

No one knows! His wicked old stepfather took him out late last night and hasn't returned him. Such a night as it was, too, and him still wearing his summer under-vests.

BEATIE.

Mr. Posket?

POPHAM.

Mr. Posket—no, my Cis!

BEATIE

How dare you speak of Master Farringdon in that familiar way?

POPHAM.

How dare I? Because me and him formed an attachment before ever you darkened our doors. [*Taking a folded printed paper from her pocket.*] You may put down the iron 'eel too heavy, Miss Tomlinson. I refer you to *Bow Bells*—"First Love is Best Love; or, The Earl's Choice."

[*As* POPHAM *offers the paper*, CIS *enters, looking very pale, worn-out, and dishevelled.*

POPHAM AND BEATIE.

Oh !

CIS.

[*Staggering to a chair.*] Where's the mater ?

POPHAM.

Not home yet.

CIS.

Thank giminy !

BEATIE.

He's ill !

POPHAM.

Oh !

[BEATIE, *assisted by* POPHAM, *quickly wheels the large armchair forward, they catch hold of* CIS *and place him in it, he submits limply.*

BEATIE.

[*Taking* CIS's *hand.*] What is the matter, Cis dear ? Tell Beatie.

POPHAM.

[*Taking his other hand.*] Well, I'm sure ! Who's given you raisins and ketchup from the store cupboard ? Come back to Emma !

[CIS, *with his eyes closed, gives a murmur.*

BEATIE.

He's whispering !

[*They both bob their heads down to listen.*

POPHAM.

He says his head's a-whirling.

BEATIE.

Put him on the sofa.

[*They take off his boots, loosen his necktie, and dab his forehead with water out of a flower-vase.*

CIS.

I—I—I wish you two girls would leave off.

BEATIE.

He's speaking again. He hasn't had any breakfast! He's hungry!

POPHAM.

Hungry! I thought he looked thin! Wait a minute, dear! Emma Popham knows what her boy fancies! [*She runs out of the room.*

CIS.

Oh, Beatie, hold my head while I ask you something.

BEATIE.

Yes, darling!

CIS.

No lady would marry a gentleman who had been a convict, would she?

BEATIE.

No; certainly not!

CIS.

I thought not! Well, Beatie, I've been run after by a policeman.

BEATIE.

[*Leaving him.*] Oh!

CIS.

Not caught, you know, only run after; and, walking home from Hendon this morning, I came to the conclusion that I ought to settle down in life. Beatie—could I write out a paper promising to marry you when I'm one-and-twenty?

BEATIE.

Don't be a silly boy—of course you could.

CIS.

Then I shall; and when I feel inclined to have a spree, I shall think of that paper and say, "Cis Farringdon, if you ever get locked up, you'll lose the most beautiful girl in the world."

BEATIE.

And so you will. [*He goes to the writing-table.*

CIS.

I'd better write it now, before my head gets well again. [*He writes; she bends over him.*

BEATIE.

You simple, foolish, Cis! If your head is so queer, shall I tell you what to say?

POPHAM *enters, carrying a tray with breakfast dishes.*

POPHAM.

[*To herself.*] He won't think so much of *her* now. His breakfast is my triumph. [*To* CIS.] Coffee, bacon, and a teacake.

BEATIE.

Hush! Master Farringdon is writing something very important.

POPHAM.

[*Going to the window.*] That's a cab at our door.

CIS.

It must be the mater—I'm off!

[*He picks up his boots and goes out quickly.*

BEATIE.

[*Following him with the paper and inkstand*] Cis! Cis! You haven't finished the promise! You haven't finished the promise!

LUGG.

[*Heard outside.*] All right, sir—I've got you—I've got you. [POPHAM *opens the door.*

POPHAM.

The master and a policeman! [LUGG *enters supporting* MR. POSKET *who sinks into an armchair with a groan.*] Oh, what's the matter?

LUGG.

All right, my good girl, you run downstairs and fetch a drop of brandy and water.

MR. POSKET.

[*Hurrying out.*] Oh!

LUGG.

Now don't take on so, sir. It's what might happen to any married gentleman. Now, you're all right now, sir. And I'll hurry back to the Court to see whether they've sent for Mr. Bullamy.

MR. POSKET.

My wife! My wife!

LUGG.

Oh, come now, sir, what *is* seven days! Why many a married gentleman in your position, sir, would have been glad to have made it fourteen.

MR. POSKET.

Go away—leave me.

LUGG.

Certainly, sir. [POPHAM *re-enters with a small tumbler of brandy and water; he takes it from her and drinks it.*] It's not wanted. I'm thankful to say he's better.

POPHAM.

[*To* LUGG.] If you please, cook presents her compliments, and she would be glad of the pleasure of your company downstairs, before leavin'. [*They go out.*

MR. POSKET.

Agatha and Lukyn! Agatha and Lukyn supping together at the Hotel des Princes, while I was at home and asleep—while I ought to have been at home and asleep! It's awful!

CIS.

[*Looking in at the door and entering.*] Hallo, Guv!

MR. POSKET.

[*Starting up.*] Cis!

CIS.

Where did you fetch, Guv?

MR. POSKET.

Where did I fetch! You wretched boy! I fetched Kilburn, and I'll fetch you a sound whipping when I recover my composure.

CIS.

What for?

MR. POSKET.

For leading me astray, sir. Yours is the first bad companionship I have ever formed! Evil communication with you, sir, has corrupted me! [*Taking* CIS *by the collar and shaking him.*] Why did you abandon me at Kilburn?

CIS.

Because you were quite done, and I branched off to draw the crowd away from you after me.

MR. POSKET.

Did you, Cis, did you? [*Putting his hand on* CIS's *shoulder.*] My boy—my boy! Oh, Cis, we're in such trouble!

CIS.

You weren't caught, Guv?

MR. POSKET.

No—but do you know who the ladies are who were supping at the Hotel des Princes?

CIS.

No—do you?

MR. POSKET.

Do I? They were your mother and Aunt Charlotte.

CIS.

The mater and Aunt Charlotte! Ha, ha, ha! [*Laughing and dancing with delight.*] Ha! ha! Oh, I say, Guv, what a lark!

MR. POSKET.

A lark! They were taken to the police station!

CIS.

[*Changing his tone.*] My mother?

MR. POSKET.

They were brought before the magistrate and sentenced.

CIS.

Sentenced?

MR. POSKET.

To seven days' imprisonment.

CIS.

Oh! [*He puts his hat on fiercely.*

MR. POSKET.

What are you going to do?

CIS.

Get my mother out first, and then break every bone in that magistrate's body.

MR. POSKET.

Cis! Cis! he's an unhappy wretch and he did his duty.

CIS.

His duty! To send another magistrate's wife to prison! Guv, I'm only a boy, but I know what professional etiquette is! Come along! Which is the police station?

MR. POSKET.

Mulberry Street.

CIS.

Who's the magistrate?

MR. POSKET.

I am!

CIS.

You! [*Seizing* MR. POSKET *by the collar and shaking him.*] You dare to lock up my mother! Come with me and get her out!

[*He is dragging* MR. POSKET *towards the door, when* MR. BULLAMY *enters breathlessly.*

MR. BULLAMY.

My dear Posket!

CIS.

[*Seizing* MR. BULLAMY *and dragging him with* MR. POSKET *to the door.*] Come with me and get my mother out.

MR. BULLAMY.

Leave me alone, sir! She *is* out! I managed it.

MR. POSKET AND CIS.

[*Together.*] How?

MR. BULLAMY.

Wormington sent to me when you were taken ill. When I arrived at the Court, he had discovered, from your man-servant, Mrs. Posket's awful position.

CIS.

You leave my mother alone! Go on!

MR. BULLAMY.

Said I to myself, "This won't do, I must extricate these people somehow!" [*To* MR. POSKET.] I'm not so damned conscientious as you are, Posket.

CIS.

Bravo! Go on!

MR. BULLAMY.

[*Producing his jujube box.*] The first thing I did was to take a jujube.

CIS.

[*Snatching the jujube box from him.*] Will you make haste?

MR. BULLAMY.

Then said I to Wormington, "Posket was *non compos mentis* when he heard this case—I'm going to re-open the matter!

CIS.

Hurrah!

MR. BULLAMY.

And I did! And what do you think I found out from the proprietor of the hotel?

MR. POSKET AND CIS.

What?

MR. BULLAMY.

That this young scamp, Mr. Cecil Farringdon, hires a room at the "Hotel des Princes."

CIS.

I know that.

MR. BULLAMY.

And that Mr. Farringdon was there last night with some low stockbroker of the name of Skinner.

CIS.

Go on—go on! [*Offering him the jujube box.*] Take a jujube!

MR. BULLAMY.

[*Taking a jujube.*] Now the law, which seems to me quite perfect, allows a man who rents a little apartment at an inn to eat and drink with his friends all night long.

CIS.

Well?

MR. BULLAMY.

So said I from the bench, "These ladies and gentlemen appear to be friends or relatives of a certain lodger in the 'Hotel des Princes.'"

CIS.

So they are!

MR. BULLAMY.

"They were all discovered in one room."

MR. POSKET.

So we were—I mean, so they were!

MR. BULLAMY.

"And I shall adjourn the case for a week to give Mr. Farringdon an opportunity of claiming these people as his guests."

CIS.

Three cheers for Bullamy.

MR. BULLAMY.

So I censured the police for their interference and released the ladies on their own recognisances.

MR. POSKET.

[*Taking* MR. BULLAMY'S *hand.*] And the men?

MR. BULLAMY.

Well, unfortunately, Wormington took upon himself to despatch the men to the House of Correction before I arrived.

MR. POSKET.

I'm glad of it! They are dissolute villains! I'm glad of it.

POPHAM *enters.*

POPHAM.

Oh, sir! Here's the missis and Miss Verrinder! In such a plight!

CIS.

The mater! Guv, you explain!

[*He hurries out.* MR. POSKET *rapidly retires into the window recess.* AGATHA POSKET *and* CHARLOTTE *enter, pale, red-eyed, and agitated.* POPHAM *goes out.*

AGATHA POSKET AND CHARLOTTE.

[*Falling on to* MR. BULLAMY'S *shoulders.*] O—o—h—h!

MR. BULLAMY.

My dear ladies!

AGATHA POSKET.

Preserver!

CHARLOTTE.

Friend!

AGATHA POSKET.

How is my boy?

MR. BULLAMY.

Never better.

AGATHA POSKET.

And the man who condemned his wife and sister-in-law to the miseries of a jail!

MR. BULLAMY.

Ahem! Posket—oh—he——

AGATHA POSKET.

Is he well enough to be told what that wife thinks of him?

MR. BULLAMY.

It might cause a relapse!

AGATHA POSKET.

It is my duty to risk that.

CHARLOTTE.

[*Raising the covers of the dishes on the table.*] Food!

AGATHA POSKET.

Ah!

[AGATHA POSKET *and* CHARLOTTE *begin to devour a teacake voraciously.*

MR. POSKET.

[*Advancing with an attempt at dignity.*] Agatha Posket.

AGATHA POSKET.

[*Rising, with her mouth full, and a piece of teacake in her hand.*] Sir!

[CHARLOTTE *takes the tray and everything on it from the table and goes towards the door.*

MR. BULLAMY.

[*Going to the door.*] There's going to be an explanation.

CHARLOTTE.

[*At the door.*] There's going to be an explanation.

[CHARLOTTE *and* MR. BULLAMY *go out quietly.*

MR. POSKET.

How dare you look me in the face, madam?

AGATHA POSKET.

How dare you look at anybody in any position, sir? You send your wife to prison for pushing a mere policeman.

MR. POSKET.

I didn't know what I was doing.

AGATHA POSKET.

Not when you requested two ladies to raise their veils and show their faces in the dock? We shouldn't have been discovered but for that.

MR. POSKET.

It was my duty.

AGATHA POSKET.

Duty! You don't go to the police court again alone! I guess now, Æneas Posket, why you clung to a single life so long *You liked it!*

MR. POSKET.

I wish I had.

AGATHA POSKET.

Why didn't you marry till you were fifty?

MR. POSKET.

Perhaps I hadn't met a widow, madam.

AGATHA POSKET.

Paltry excuse. You revelled in a dissolute bachelorhood!

MR. POSKET.

Hah! Whist every evening!

AGATHA POSKET.

You can't play whist *alone*. You're an expert at hiding too!

MR. POSKET.

If I were I should thrash your boy!

AGATHA POSKET.

When you wished to conceal yourself last night, you selected a table with a lady under it.

MR. POSKET.

Ah, did you pinch me, or did Charlotte?

AGATHA POSKET.

I did—Charlotte's a single girl.

MR. POSKET.

I fancy, madam, you found my conduct under that table perfectly respectful?

AGATHA POSKET.

I don't know—I was too agitated to notice.

MR. POSKET.

Evasion—you're like all the women.

AGATHA POSKET.

Profligate! You oughtn't to know that!

MR. POSKET.

No wife of mine sups, unknown to me, with dissolute military men; we will have a judicial separation, Mrs. Posket.

AGATHA POSKET.

Certainly—I suppose you'll manage that at your police court, too?

MR. POSKET.

I shall send for my solicitor at once.

AGATHA POSKET.

Æneas! Mr. Posket! Whatever happens, you shall not have the custody of my boy.

MR. POSKET.

Your boy! *I* take charge of *him?* Agatha Posket, he has been my evil genius! He has made me a gambler at an atrocious game, called "Fireworks"—he has tortured my mind with abstruse speculations concerning "Sillikin" and "Butterscotch" for the St. Leger—he has caused me to cower before servants, and to fly before the police.

AGATHA POSKET.

He! My Cis?

CIS *enters having changed his clothes.*

CIS.

[*Breezily.*] Hallo, mater—got back?

AGATHA POSKET.

You wicked boy! You dare to have apartments at the "Hotel des Princes!"

MR. POSKET.

Yes—and it was to put a stop to that which induced me to go to Meek Street last night.

CIS.

Don't be angry, mater! I've got you out of your difficulties.

MR. POSKET.

But you got me into mine!

CIS.

Well, I know I did—one can't be always doing the right thing! It isn't Guv's fault—there!

MR. POSKET.

Swear it!

AGATHA POSKET.

No, he doesn't know the nature of an oath! I believe him! Æneas, I see now, this is all the result of a lack of candour on my part. Tell me, have you ever particularly observed this child?

MR. POSKET.

Oh!

AGATHA POSKET.

Has it ever struck you he is a little forward?

MR. POSKET.

Sometimes.

AGATHA POSKET.

You are wrong; he is awfully backward. [*Taking* MR. POSKET'S *hand.*] Æneas; men always think they are marrying angels, and women would be angels if they never had to grow old. That warps their dispositions. I have deceived you, Æneas.

MR. POSKET.

Ah! Lukyn!

AGATHA POSKET.

No—no—you don't understand! Lukyn was my boy's godfather in eighteen sixty-six.

MR. POSKET.

1866?

CIS.

1886?

CIS AND MR. POSKET.

[*Together, reckoning rapidly upon their fingers.*] 1886.

AGATHA POSKET.

S-s-s-h! Don't count! Cis, go away! [*To* MR. POSKET.] When you proposed to me in the "Pantheon" at Spa, you particularly remarked, "Mrs. Farringdon, I love you for yourself *alone*."

MR. POSKET.

I know I did.

AGATHA POSKET.

Those were terrible words to address to a widow with a son of nineteen. [CIS *and* MR. POSKET *again reckon rapidly upon their fingers.*] Don't count, Æneas, don't count! Those words tempted me. I glanced at my face in a neighbouring mirror, and I said "Æneas is fifty—why should I—a mere woman, compete with him on the question of age? He has already the advantage—I will be generous—I will add to it!" I led you to believe I had been married only fifteen years ago, I deceived you and my boy as to his real age, and I told you I was but one-and-thirty.

MR. POSKET.

It wasn't the truth?

AGATHA POSKET.

Ah! I merely lacked woman's commonest fault, exaggeration.

MR. POSKET.

But—Lukyn?

AGATHA POSKET.

Knows the real facts. I went to him last night to beg him not to disturb an arrangement which had brought happiness to all parties. Look. In place of a wayward, troublesome child, I now present you with a youth old enough to be a joy, comfort, and support!

CIS.

Oh, I say, mater, this is a frightful sell for a fellow.

AGATHA POSKET.

Go to your room, sir.

CIS.

I always thought there was something wrong with me. Blessed if I'm not behind the age!

[CIS *goes out.*

AGATHA POSKET.

Forgive me, Æneas. Look at my bonnet! A night in Mulberry Street, without even a powder-puff, is an awful expiation.

MR. POSKET.

Agatha! How do I know Cis won't be five-and twenty to-morrow?

AGATHA POSKET.

No—no—you know the worst, and as long as I live, I'll never deceive you again—except in little things.

LUKYN *and* VALE *enter.*

LUKYN.

[*Boiling with rage.*] By George, Posket!

MR. POSKET.

My dear Lukyn!

LUKYN.

Do you know I am a confounded jail-bird, sir?

MR. POSKET.

An accident!

LUKYN.

And do you know what has happened to me in jail —a soldier, sir—an officer?

MR. POSKET.

No!

LUKYN.

I have been washed by the authorities.

MR. POSKET.

Lukyn, no!

CHARLOTTE *has entered, and she rushes across to* VALE.

CHARLOTTE.

Horace! Horace! Not you, too?

VALE.

By Jove, Charlotte, I would have died first.

MR. BULLAMY *enters quickly.*

MR. BULLAMY.

Mr. Posket, I shall choke, sir! Inspector Messiter is downstairs and says that Isidore, the waiter, swears that you are the man who escaped from Meek Street last night.

LUKYN.

What?

MR. BULLAMY.

This is a public scandal, sir!

LUKYN.

Your game is up, sir!

MR. BULLAMY.

You have brought a stain upon a spotless police court!

LUKYN.

And lectured me upon propriety and decorum.

MR. POSKET.

Gentlemen, gentlemen, when you have heard my story you will pity me.

LUKYN AND MR. BULLAMY.

[*Laughing ironically.*] Ha! ha!

MR. POSKET.

You will find your old friend a Man, a Martyr, and a Magistrate!

CIS *enters, pulling* BEATIE *after him.*

CIS.

Come on, Beatie! Guv—mater! here's news! Beatie and I have made up our minds to be married.

AGATHA POSKET.

Oh!

POPHAM *enters with champagne and glasses.*

MR. POSKET.

What's this?

CIS.

Bollinger—'74—extra dry—to drink our health and happiness.

CHARLOTTE.

Champagne! It may save my life!

AGATHA POSKET.

Miss Tomlinson, go home!

MR. POSKET.

Stop! Cis Farringdon, my dear boy, you are but nineteen at present, but you were only fourteen yesterday, so you are a growing lad; on the day you marry and start for Canada, I will give you a thousand pounds!

POPHAM.

[*Putting her apron to her eyes.*] Oh!

CIS.

[*Embracing* BEATIE.] Hurrah! We'll be married directly.

AGATHA POSKET.

He's an infant! I forbid it!

MR. POSKET.

I am his legal guardian. Gentlemen, bear witness! I solemnly consent to that little wretch's marriage!

[AGATHA POSKET *sinks into a chair.*

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